

REPORT OF THE
SCRIPTURE STUDY COMMITTEE
TO THE
TWENTY-EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
Scripture Study Committee

MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

Gary Bennett, Stephen Dillman, Bradley Estep, Thomas King (chair), Joseph Knight, Melvin McCullough, Jesse C. Middendorf, Thomas Noble, Christian Sarmiento, Arthur Snijders, Alexander Varughese (secretary), and David Wilson; with valuable assistance from Stan Ingersol and Shirley Marvin.

OVERVIEW

The Board of General Superintendents assigned the Scripture Study Committee (SSC) with the task of reflecting upon a total of three resolutions from the 2009 General Assembly, and making appropriate recommendations for action by the 2013 General Assembly. The following report begins with the committee's response to resolution JUD-805 regarding Article IV (The Holy Scriptures) of the Articles of Faith. This is followed by the committee's response to Resolution JUD-802 and Resolution JUD-816 both regarding Article VI. Atonement, of the Articles of Faith. The report culminates with a resolution from the Scripture Study Committee regarding the referral of future resolutions addressing the Articles of Faith.

I. RESPONSE TO THE 2009 GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION JUD-805, REGARDING ARTICLE IV (THE HOLY SCRIPTURES)

Resolution JUD-805: regarding Article IV. The Holy Scriptures; to remove the phrase “inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation,” and replace it with the phrase, “inerrant throughout, and the supreme authority on everything the Scriptures teach.”

RECOMMENDATION

Reject Resolution JUD-805 which seeks to alter the wording of Article IV. The Holy Scriptures. This committee recommends leaving this Article of Faith as it currently stands.

RATIONALE

The proposals at the 2009 General Assembly to amend Article IV of the Nazarene Articles of Faith in order to assert the complete inerrancy of Scripture clearly come from a concern that the Bible be given its rightful place in our life and theology. Having been asked to evaluate these proposals, the committee begins by expressing our appreciation for this concern and wish to make clear our solidarity with all those who have a high view of the place of the Bible in the life of the Church and of each Christian. John Wesley declared himself to be *homo unius libri*, ‘a man of one book,’ and described the Methodists as ‘Bible-Christians’ determined to preach ‘plain, old Bible-Christianity.’¹ So we join with all those who assert and maintain the authority of the Bible for the Christian faith and practice, doctrine and ethics. Article IV, like all

¹ Preface to Sermons, *Works* [BE], Vol. 1, page 105; and ‘Short History of Methodism,’ *Works* [BE], Vol. 9, page 369.

the other articles is an article of faith and so is part of our faith. In the light of that, and in that spirit, we offer this report.

1. THE STRENGTH OF ARTICLE IV

We wish to begin by drawing attention to the strength of the present Article IV as a declaration of our commitment to the authority of the Bible.

(a) Plenary, divine inspiration

First, the article clearly states the inspiration of Holy Scripture as ‘divine’ and ‘plenary’: that means that the *whole* Bible is inspired and that it is inspired, not just in the sense that a work of art may be said to be ‘inspired’, but by God. To say that the Bible *as a whole* is inspired is to say that we cannot take texts out of context and quote them arbitrarily as ‘the word of God.’ We have to understand biblical theology as a whole. Nor do we believe that divine inspiration cancels out the human authorship. Each book has a distinct style, vocabulary, and idiom reflecting the quite different human authors and contexts, whether of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Luke, Paul, or even writers unknown. We do not believe in a mechanical idea of inspiration in which their minds were blotted out and they became mere puppets. Rather their mental powers were heightened and their free wills guided by the subtle and sensitive Spirit of God. Whether they were gathering information to write a narrative, or editing what had previously been written, or were putting into writing speech directly inspired by the Holy Spirit, the result was a collection of documents fit for the purpose of revealing God’s will and way, God’s acts, and supremely God’s revelation in his Incarnate Son. We agree therefore with the Cape Town Commitment of the Third Lausanne Congress when they say in their confession of faith:

We receive the whole Bible as the Word of God, inspired by God’s Spirit, spoken and written through human authors. We submit to it as supremely and uniquely authoritative, governing our belief and behavior. We testify to the power of God’s Word to accomplish his purpose of salvation. We affirm that the whole Bible is the final written word of God, not surpassed by any further revelation, but we also rejoice that the Holy Spirit illumines the minds of God’s people so that the Bible continues to speak God’s truth in fresh ways to people in every culture.²

We strongly endorse the emphasis in this Cape Town Commitment that we love God’s Word because we love God, love his world, love the gospel, love the people of God, and love the mission of God.

(b) Inerrantly revealing the will of God

Secondly, Article IV clearly states that the Holy Scriptures reveal the will of God *inerrantly*. That means that what Holy Scripture tells us about God and his saving acts and purpose cannot be set aside by any merely human philosophy, metaphysics, or ethics. Human reason and culture are all fallen and therefore suspect when it comes to discerning

² *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action* (The Lausanne Movement, 2011).

the will of God, but we each may trust the word of God given to us in Holy Scripture as ‘a lamp to my feet and a light to my path’ (Psalm 119:105). Human reason and experience may guide us in many things, but when it comes to the things of God (which shapes all of life), they must bow to what he has revealed to us in the inspired Scriptures. This belief is what is usually known as the ‘infallibility’ of Scripture, that it ‘inerrantly reveals the will of God in all things necessary to salvation’ as distinct from absolute ‘inerrancy’ in every factual detail. This implies that, while the Holy Spirit guides us as we listen for the voice of God speaking to us through Scripture, no claims to private revelations of the truth of God which are additional to Scripture are acceptable.

This does not imply however that we are infallible in our interpretation of the Bible. Some Christians think that they are merely stating what the Bible says, but that is naïve. Whether we like it or not, every Christian is actually engaged in *interpreting* the Bible. Accordingly, we must interpret each word in its sentence, each sentence in its paragraph, each paragraph within the argument of the book as a whole, and each biblical book within the Scriptures as a whole. We interpret the New Testament against the background of the Old Testament, and the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament and particularly as progressive revelation leads up to the final revelation of God in Jesus Christ. We follow the guidance of the ancient creeds of the Church as we interpret the Scriptures together. All of this calls not only for careful scholarship, but also for dependence on the Holy Spirit. We expect all preachers and teachers particularly to be committed to the interpretation of the Scriptures given in the ancient creeds and the Articles of Faith, but on other matters we affirm freedom of interpretation provided it is in a spirit of loyalty to the Church. As we interpret Scripture together within the fellowship of the Church, we look to the Holy Spirit to guide us in the future into ‘the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect’ (Romans 12:2).

(c) All things necessary to our salvation

Thirdly, that brings us to the point that Article IV makes clear the purpose of Holy Scripture: that it reveals the will of God “...in all things necessary to our salvation...” John Wesley was very clear that the purpose of being a person ‘of one book’ was to find ‘the way to heaven.’ The Bible is not to be treated as an almanac or a magic book or a text book of history or science. Its truth is expressed in the thought forms of the ancient world, in their culture, context, geography, cosmology, and language. But on the other hand, God’s action in the *history* of Israel and supremely in the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ *was* ‘necessary to our salvation.’ Accordingly, it is part of our faith that the Bible is the God-given account of God’s action in space-time history and therefore an integral part of God’s revelation in history and uniquely in the Lord Jesus Christ. And while science progresses by studying ‘the book of nature’ rather than by biblical study, nonetheless modern science arose in a Christian culture out of Christian convictions, and ultimately we believe that everything we know through science will be seen to be more than compatible with all that has been revealed to us through Holy Scripture.

Faith in the word of the gospel of salvation also implies obedience to the law of God. To live intentionally violating the law of God as interpreted by Jesus and the apostles is the antinomian denial of the faith. Christian ethics are

formulated as the Church interprets Holy Scripture guided by the Holy Spirit and taking note of the wisdom of the Church through the ages.

(d) What is not from Holy Scripture cannot be a doctrine of the Church

Fourthly, the final compound clause of Article IV is perhaps the strongest of all. Its wording derives (via Wesley's Twenty-five Articles) from Article VI of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England:

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man [*sic*], that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite necessary to salvation.

This asserts one of the cardinal principles of the Reformation, the *sola scriptura*, that Holy Scripture is the only source of Christian doctrine. It says that only what is read in Scripture or proved from Scripture is to be required as an article of faith or is necessary to salvation. Of course, as Wesleyans we know (as do the other major theological traditions in the one Church) that Scripture has to be interpreted. We interpret Scripture, guided by the *traditions* of the Church, in the light of our *experience* as the people of God, and using sanctified *reason*. But according to this sentence none of these can be *in itself* the source or basis for Christian doctrine, and as we look at the other Nazarene Articles of Faith, we see that this is in fact true. They are all derived from Scripture. Christian tradition helps us today to interpret Scripture, and human reason and experience are engaged in this interpretation and in articulating our doctrines. Reason and experience have shaped the way these Articles of Faith were formed and they still shape the way we express our doctrines and they may even corroborate them. But every doctrine we profess together as a denomination in our Articles of Faith is in fact based upon and derived from Holy Scripture.

Such is the strength of Article IV therefore, that as a committee we believe that when it is fully understood, it is a good and sufficient guard against any theology that departs from Holy Scripture. Its strength and clarity needs to be understood and appreciated by all who preach in Nazarene pulpits and teach in Nazarene colleges/universities. The committee therefore believes that it is not only unnecessary, but that it would be untrue to the Wesleyan tradition, incompatible with Wesleyan theology, and unwarranted by the Scriptures themselves, to add any assertion that the Scriptures are 'inerrant throughout' not only in revealing the will of God for our salvation, but in determining the truth of any statement whatsoever. That would be to turn the Bible from the saving word of God into an almanac or encyclopedia. To say that the Scriptures are 'the supreme authority on everything the Scriptures teach' merely raises the question of what exactly the Scriptures teach, and there are numerous unsettled disputes among Christians (and even among Nazarenes) about that. To assert the complete detailed factual literal accuracy of every part of Scripture ('inerrant throughout') raises more problems than it solves and diverts people into unnecessary, distracting and futile disputes.

To support this conclusion, we need to expand on this key-note paragraph. We need to understand where this demand for complete detailed ‘inerrancy’ comes from, why it is unnecessary and misleading, and what the view of Nazarene theologians has been.

2. THE CALVINIST ORIGIN OF THE ASSERTION OF DETAILED INERRANCY

The debate over ‘inerrancy’ has been particularly strong in North America over the last few decades, sparked off in 1974 by the book written by Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, and at first it might appear that the assertion of this kind of inerrancy is commendable. However, it is necessary to understand that this assertion of the complete inerrancy of Scripture in every detail (‘inerrancy throughout’) comes out of one particular Calvinist tradition. It is part of a particular Calvinist theological method, and it cannot be understood apart from its place in the rationalism which too often characterizes that theology. The Calvinist theologians who taught at Princeton in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Charles Hodge (1797-1878) and B. B. Warfield (1851-1921), inherited this assertion from previous Calvinists such as the Swiss-Italian theologian, Francis Turretin (1623-1687), and it comes directly from their Calvinist concerns. In their battle with the Roman Catholics, the Calvinist theologians of the century after John Calvin held to the authority of the Bible in order to oppose the authority of the pope and the cardinals. Their apologetic strategy prompted them to assert the authority of the Bible as a basis for faith in Christ rather than as something which was implied by faith in Christ. Their method became to establish first the truth and authority of the Bible, and then build faith in Christ on that. Intellectual persuasion and apologetics therefore came first. Some Lutherans departed from Martin Luther by taking a similar position. Accordingly many of the Reformed Confessions in the post-Reformation period began with the Article of Faith on the Bible. It was in that context that they began to assert the inerrancy of the Bible. In keeping with their deductive method in theology, they argued that since God was perfect, and since the Bible came from him, the Bible must be ‘perfect’ in the sense of being without any error in the smallest detail. It was a presupposition they brought to the Bible rather than a conclusion from the study of the biblical text itself. Not all Calvinists took this position. The Dutch and Scottish Calvinist traditions (Hermann Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper, and James Orr) are different and closer to John Calvin and the Reformers. The insistence on inerrancy was particularly strong among American Calvinists, perhaps helping to explain why Fundamentalism is a predominantly American phenomenon.

The continental Reformers themselves, John Calvin, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and the others, made no such claim, and no such claim is made in Article VI of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. This was a new claim in the post-Reformation period. For the Reformers themselves, it was faith in Christ which led to trust in the Bible. Martin Luther first proclaimed justification by faith (*sola fide*) and it was only when he realized that the pope rejected this that he saw the necessity that the Church be subject to the Bible (*sola scriptura*). For these later theologians in the Calvinist tradition, faith in the inerrancy of the Bible became the foundation for faith in Christ. It was from this Calvinist tradition, passed on through the nineteenth-century Calvinist theologians at Princeton, that the Fundamentalists of the 1920s took their belief in the total, detailed inerrancy of Scripture. Harold Lindsell tried to hold all evangelical Christians to this particular Calvinist belief in the 1970s and seriously divided evangelical Christianity, at least in the United States if not elsewhere. This whole development with its concern with detailed inerrant facts, demonstrates how much the Calvinist tradition was shaped by rationalistic modernity.

Wesleyans are truer to the original Reformation. We know that we are not brought to faith by having the inerrancy of the Bible proved to us, but that our faith in Christ is what leads us to trust his messengers, the prophets and apostles, and all who wrote the Holy Scriptures. It is *not* that we are committed as a denomination to the opposite view that the Scriptures are *unreliable* or that they are historically *untrustworthy*. No: we are committed to the belief that the Scriptures give us a *sufficiently* accurate account of God's action in the history of Israel and particularly in the birth, life, death, and bodily resurrection of the Lord. It is rather that we do not think that highlighting the issue of *detailed* factual inerrancy is helpful or necessary to insisting on the full authority and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture. Article VI of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England is therefore entitled, 'Of the Sufficiency of Holy Scripture', and this concept of 'sufficiency' also appears in the title of Article Five of the Twenty-five Articles John Wesley gave to American Methodism.³

3. WHY THIS CALVINIST BELIEF IS THE WRONG WAY TO ASSERT THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

There are two severe disadvantages in asserting the authority of Scripture by claiming the detailed factual inerrancy of Scripture instead of its 'sufficiency.' First, the concept of 'error' is not a helpful one since it is impossible to define what constitutes an 'error.' The word seems to imply the need for absolute accuracy, but what degree of accuracy is appropriate? Do we insist on the kind of accuracy of modern scientific language which is foreign to all ancient literature? Are round figures acceptable? Must every narrative observe strict chronological accuracy? Are metaphors and parables disallowed? Are we going to insist that the stories Jesus told must be factually accurate? Even if we accept that the Scriptures are full of metaphor and parable and other figures of speech, are we going to decree where everyone must draw the line—what is literal fact and what is metaphor and parable, poetry and vision? The concept of 'error' is an *absolutist* word applied to something which is necessarily a matter of *degree*, and it is consequently a nightmare since it leads us straight into frankly silly and futile questions. That is the second point here: this misguided concept of detailed 'inerrancy' diverts attention to unprofitable debates about unimportant details. Was it Abiathar or Abimelech who was high priest when David ate the showbread? Were there two angels at the tomb, or was there only one? Were there several women at the tomb on Easter morning or was there only one? Did Judas hang himself or did he die some other way? There are innumerable debates on points which have no bearing on the truth of the gospel and which are a waste of time. Because we are dealing with ancient literature, we frequently do not have enough information to determine whether an apparent contradiction is truly a contradiction or not. To assert complete inerrancy therefore is to be diverted into petty and unprofitable arguments like those at Ephesus who debated 'myths and genealogies which promote vain speculations' and had 'wandered away into vain discussion' (1 Timothy 1:4-6).

What persuades us of the truth of Scripture is that when it is preached in the power of the Spirit we come face to face with the Lord. We not only know 'that he died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the

³ For the importance of this concept of 'sufficiency' for salvation, see Paul Merritt Bassett, 'The Theological Identity of the North American Holiness Movement: Its Understanding of the Nature and Role of the Bible,' *Varieties of American Evangelicalism* (Knoxville, TN, 1991), pages 72-108, especially pages 76-79.

Scriptures, that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve' (1 Corinthians 15:3-5). Paul gives us these as the central facts of the gospel, and we believe that there is no good reason to doubt their historicity. But it is not merely a matter of being given accurate facts. It is rather that through this narrative, we come to meet and know and trust and place our faith in the Risen Lord himself. That is how the narrative of the gospel carries conviction when we evangelize—not by persuading the seeker that we can determine accurately how many angels were at the tomb. The authority of Scripture is validated by the Holy Spirit as we tell 'the old, old story.'

We respect our brothers and sisters who love Scripture and want to defend its authority, but as Wesleyans it is our conviction that trying to do so in this Calvinist way is the wrong way to do it.

4. THE UNITED VIEW OF NAZARENE THEOLOGIANS

It is true that at the height of the Fundamentalist-Modernist battle in the 1920s, Nazarene leaders expressed their solidarity with the Fundamentalists. Given the alternative, a Modernist/Liberal theology in which (as H. Richard Niebuhr put it), 'A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross,' that is hardly surprising! But the denomination's premier theologian, H. Orton Wiley, had a deeper understanding of the issues.⁴ Wesleyans were committed to asserting the authority of the Bible against Modernism, but not in the simplistic way in which Fundamentalists tried to do it. Paul M. Bassett writes that, following in the tradition of the Wesleyan theologians, Richard Watson, W. B. Pope and John Miley, "Wiley clearly enters the lists against American theological liberalism on the one hand and against fundamentalism on the other."⁵ In his *Christian Theology*, he criticizes the Protestant scholastics in the century after the Reformation in that they began "to substitute the written Word for Christ the Living Word." In the context in which he was writing, it is clear (as Paul Bassett argues) that H. Orton Wiley was also criticizing the Fundamentalists of his day who had inherited their view of the Bible's detailed inerrancy from scholastic Calvinism.⁶ He goes so far as to warn against three 'worthy monarchs' to whom we can mistakenly give a false position in place of Christ, the Living Word: the church, the Bible, and reason. There is good reason to conclude that it was H. Orton Wiley who drafted Article IV at the 1928 General Assembly, which is good reason in itself why Article IV should not be amended.

Timothy L. Smith, in a letter to the editor of *Christianity Today* published on March 10, 1978 similarly maintained that Wesleyans reject both the 'liberal' or 'modernist' stance and also the narrow inerrantist view of Scripture associated with B. B. Warfield and Harold Lindsell. Timothy Smith wrote: '...we Wesleyans stand in an older and much broader evangelical tradition than that represented by modern neo-Calvinist scholasticism.' In a letter to the editor of *The Christian Century*, he maintained that 'the roots of the nonfundamentalist view of scriptural

⁴ For the way in which the Fundamentalist concerns invaded the holiness movement and the Church of the Nazarene for a time, see Paul Merritt Bassett, 'The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement, 1914-1940: The Church of the Nazarene: A Case Study,' *Wesleyan Theological Journal (WTJ)* 13:1 (1978), pages 65-91; and Stan Ingersol, 'Strange Bedfellows: The Nazarenes and Fundamentalism,' *WTJ* 40:2 (2005), pages 123-141.

⁵ Bassett, 'Theological Identity,' cf. 91.

⁶ Bassett 'Theological Identity,' 91-94, referring to Wiley, *Christian Theology*, pages 1:140-142.

authority accepted by many evangelicals' lay in the writings of the Reformers, and that the Hodge-Warfield view of inerrancy was never held by evangelical leaders such as William Booth, Adoniram J. Gordon, Dwight L. Moody, or the leaders of the National Holiness Association. He rejected the contemporary efforts of the inerrantists, Harold Lindsell and Francis Schaeffer, 'to impose upon modern evangelicals a view of Scripture which Jesus and Paul renounced in rabbinical Judaism.'⁷

Similarly, Ralph Earle quotes the early Nazarene theologian A. M. Hills, that the Bible is infallible in what it tells us about God and salvation, not in detailed inerrancy:

What is the infallibility we claim for the Bible? It is infallible as regards the purpose for which it was written. It is infallible as a revelation of God's saving love in Christ to a wicked world. It infallibly guides all honest and willing and seeking souls to Christ, to holiness, to heaven.⁸

Ralph Earle then goes on to defend a fellow evangelical scholar who accepted that there are errors in the Bible in rhetoric, history and science. At the same time he thought that this colleague had made more concessions than he needed to and had accepted that there were factual contradictions where the historical accounts could be harmonized by careful hermeneutics.⁹

J. Kenneth Grider similarly rejected detailed inerrancy. He takes note of one sentence from Wesley quoted by Harold Lindsell which seems to teach detailed inerrancy, but argues that when that sentence is taken in the context of Wesley's whole theology, he did not teach inerrancy as part of his theological method in the way of scholastic Calvinism. J. Kenneth Grider argues: "...Scripture itself is not interested in inerrancy. It makes a claim for inspiration, but not for inerrancy—at least, not for total inerrancy."

J. Kenneth Grider examines that claim to inspiration in 2 Timothy 3:16, and points out that according to the text it is inspiration specifically for teaching (doctrine) and practice.¹⁰

Rob L. Staples contrasts Wesleyanism with Fundamentalism, which arose in Calvinistic soil and insists on 'epistemological inerrancy.' Wesleyanism works differently and takes a view which he calls 'soteriological inerrancy.'¹¹ In another article, he begins with the saying of Martin Luther: 'The Bible is the manger in which Christ is laid.' Rob Staples comments:

The point of Martin Luther's analogy is that Christ, who is the Living Word, is to be found in the Bible, which is the written Word. But the latter is an instrument directing us to the former, and thus not an end in itself.¹²

⁷ Timothy L. Smith, "Reader's Response: Determining Biblical Authority's Base," *The Christian Century* 95 (March 2, 1977): page 198.

⁸ A.M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, Pasadena: C.J. Kline, 1931, page I:134.

⁹ Ralph Earle, "Further Thoughts on Biblical Inspiration," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Winter 1963): pages 7-17, (especially page 15).

¹⁰ J. Kenneth Grider, 'Wesleyanism and the Inerrancy Issue, *WTJ* 19:2 (1984), pages 52-61.

¹¹ Rob L. Staples, 'Inerrancy,' *Holiness Today*, June 1998, page 5.

¹² Rob L. Staples, 'Scripture,' *Holiness Today*, December 1998, page 11.

Paul M. Bassett argued in an article on the understanding of the Bible in the holiness movement, that its history and inner logic would lead it to conclude ‘that a call like Lindsell’s [for detailed inerrancy] is theologically and spiritually irrelevant.’ Paul Bassett continues:

Its history and inner logic would lead it to conclude that, if the term inerrancy be used, as it is, it refers to the Bible’s service as the unique creation of the Holy Spirit, intended by that Spirit to carry conviction for sin, the news of full salvation in Christ, and sure instruction in how to relate to God and neighbor in righteousness and true holiness. In these things the Bible is to be understood as wholly inerrant.

Paul Bassett proceeds to rule out the more detailed inerrancy (‘inerrancy throughout’):

The movement has concluded that, since empirical or scientific exactitudes certainly are not soteriologically ultimate and are not even metaphysically ultimate, they must be accounted for in terms of something other than scientific exactitude itself... Most holiness people would insist that all such questions must submit to the question of the ultimate purpose of Scripture itself, which is not absolutely accurate knowledge of all things in heaven and earth but soteriological sufficiency.¹³

H. Ray Dunning notes that some evangelicals base the Bible’s authority on its inerrancy, but concludes that ‘such rationalistic defenses are less than compelling.’¹⁴ H. Ray Dunning goes on to quote A. M. Hills, Clark H. Pinnock, Richard S. Taylor, H. Orton Wiley, and even John Calvin to support the alternative view of the Bible’s authority, that we are persuaded of it by the *testimonium internum Spiritus sancti*, the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. This he sees as an aspect of the doctrine of prevenient grace.¹⁵

We have to conclude then that Nazarene theologians as a whole, with few if any exceptions, are totally opposed to the idea that we need to assert the complete detailed factual inerrancy of Holy Scripture in order to defend its authority. As a body, they are totally committed to its authority in matters of faith and practice, doctrine and ethics. The question of whether the Bible is totally accurate in every statement is not therefore something on which the Church needs to pronounce one way or the other in its official Articles of Faith, for it is quite irrelevant.

Two editors of the *Herald of Holiness* made the very good point that the present Article of Faith IV is a broad one. W. E. McCumber commented in ‘The Answer Corner’ that Article IV “does not commit us for or against total inerrancy, and, as one would expect, there are proponents of both concepts of ‘plenary inspiration’ to be found among us.” He himself concluded, ‘It is not errorless, but it will infallibly achieve its purpose when the Holy Spirit uses it to convict of sin and draw to Christ, making possible our salvation.’¹⁶ Wesley Tracy, in ‘The Question Box,’ made clear his view that the inerrancy view “has become the trademark and battle cry of rigid, right wing, Calvinist fundamentalists” and does not belong in the Wesleyan tradition. Nonetheless, he comments that Article IV is a “roomy one”: and that both the rigid

¹³ Paul Merritt Bassett, ‘Theological Identity,’ 94f.

¹⁴ H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1988), page 62.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pages 58-65.

¹⁶ W.E. McCumber, *Herald of Holiness* March 15, 1985, page 31.

fundamentalist who believes in inerrancy can assent to the article, while those “who take a less rigid view... also have elbow room.”¹⁷

That brings us to a final thought. Not only is the detailed inerrancy view at variance with Wesleyan theology, and repudiated by leading Nazarene theologians, but if Article IV were to be amended to restrict us to that particular view of Scripture, the present breadth which can comprehend both views would be replaced by this narrower fundamentalist view. Since Nazarene theologians and biblical scholars as a whole would be very strongly opposed to this narrowing of this Article of Faith, as would many leading pastors and lay people, such a move would threaten a very serious division in the denomination. The division and severe crisis and pain seen in other denominations indicate that this could have very serious results for our unity and could do serious damage to the Church of the Nazarene.

For all these reasons, the committee strongly advises that these amendments should be rejected. Nazarenes are committed by the present Article IV to the sufficiency of Holy Scripture, its final authority in all matters of Christian faith and living, in doctrine and ethics. That is all we need to say.

II. RESPONSE TO RESOLUTION JUD-802 AND RESOLUTION JUD-816 REGARDING ARTICLE VI (ATONEMENT)

OVERVIEW

In 2001, 2005, and 2009, each General Assembly received resolutions regarding the terminology of Article VI. Atonement. In 2001, three resolutions came from the delegates seeking to change the term “meritorious” to “sacrificial” (“...by His [meritorious] sacrificial death on the Cross...”). The legislative committee appointed to study the resolutions amended them, and recommended the removal of both terms (“meritorious” and “sacrificial”) from the statement. The 2001 General Assembly and the districts approved the amended resolution; thus, neither “meritorious” nor “sacrificial” appear in the current statement of this Article of Faith (“...by His death on the Cross...”). In 2005 and 2009, each General Assembly received resolutions to restore the term “meritorious” to Article VI (“...by His meritorious death on the Cross...”). In both cases, the resolutions were referred to the Board of General Superintendents (BGS) for further study. The BGS, in turn, assigned the Scripture Study Committee with the task of reflecting upon two resolutions on Article VI from the 2009 General Assembly, and making appropriate recommendations for action by the 2013 General Assembly.

Resolution JUD-802: seeks to reinsert the term “meritorious” to the wording of Article of Faith VI. Atonement (“by his meritorious death on the Cross”).

Resolution JUD-816: seeks to change the wording of Article of Faith VI. Atonement by including various “references to the love of God as a motivating factor in the atonement (John 3:16) and broader references to other aspects of the atonement.”

¹⁷ Wesley Tracy, *Herald of Holiness*, January 1992, page 33.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Reject Resolution JUD-802 which seeks to insert the term “meritorious” in the wording of Article of Faith VI. Atonement. This committee recommends leaving Article of Faith VI as it currently stands.

Recommendation 2: Reject Resolution JUD-816 which seeks to change the wording of Article of Faith VI by including various “references to the love of God as a motivating factor in the atonement (John 3:16) and broader references to other aspects of the atonement.” The committee recommends leaving Article of Faith VI as it currently stands.

Recommendation 3: The committee recommends that the 2013 General Assembly call upon the various institutions of the Church of the Nazarene to host and produce studies, conferences, and writings aimed at expounding the concept of atonement, thereby enriching the Church’s comprehension and faith.

RATIONALE

Broad range of the Atonement’s Provisions. The Bible uses a wide range of images to capture the vast dimensions of Christ’s atoning death on the Cross. These include sacrifice, ransom/redemption, propitiation, satisfaction, substitution, moral influence, and others. These models express various views regarding the roles of God’s wrath and God’s love in relation to atonement. Clearly, none of these can exhibit the full mosaic of provisions bestowed on sinful humanity through the atonement. Thus, it is appropriate that Article of Faith VI avoid terminology which confers disproportionate attention upon one image to the exclusion or neglect of others. It is in the interest of protecting the comprehensive nature of God’s magnanimous love demonstrated on the Cross and the unity in the Church arising from its common grace that the committee makes this recommendation.

Moreover the Article of Faith on the atoning death of Christ cannot be read without the biblical truths expressed in other Articles of Faith on the sinfulness of humanity, our need for justification and full sanctification, the judgment and righteousness of God, and the renewal of all of creation. Christ’s death abundantly answers the realities of man’s and creation’s need for reconciliation with our holy God and with one another (Romans 5:15-17).

Concise language in the Church’s Articles of Faith. The Church’s Articles of Faith seek to reflect two concerns: 1) to communicate the essential elements of faith for each doctrine, and 2) to avoid terminology that either subtracts from or exceeds beyond what is germane to the exposition of an individual doctrine. Therefore, the Articles of Faith have been carefully crafted, and are intentionally concise. Thus, we believe that it is only necessary to affirm the central truth of the doctrine as expressed in the current Articles of Faith.

Unnecessary to Reinstate “Meritorious.” There are good reasons why it is not necessary to reinstate “meritorious:” 1) the word ‘meritorious’ was not a major one in John Wesley’s own preaching in the doctrine of the atonement and is not presented as a major term in his doctrine according to the main contemporary historical scholars (Collins, Maddox, Williams), 2) the word ‘meritorious’ is not highlighted in the theology of H. Orton Wiley, although the cognate concepts of satisfaction, substitution, and propitiation are, and 3) the word ‘meritorious’ is not itself a biblical word.

Sufficiency of Current Statement. The words ‘meritorious’ and ‘sacrificial’, while appropriate, are unnecessary since what they say is already included in the very word ‘atonement.’ The term ‘atonement’ itself includes the key concept that Christ offered himself as the sacrifice through which alone we are reconciled to God and thus merited (or ‘won’ or ‘secured’—Hebrews 9:12) our redemption through his obedience.

CONCLUSION

More collaborative study needed. The committee recognizes the value of healthy discussion and in-depth study in relation to this cardinal doctrine on the atonement. However, such dialogue should extend beyond narrowly selected aspects to encompass its vast range of meaning. Investigation should be pursued for the sake of enriching our Church’s confession by her larger understanding of God’s gracious work of salvation.

Since the Church of the Nazarene embraces the atonement in its totality, the committee encourages further dialogue and study by its theologically minded members. This calls for a scholarly and reverent discernment between the images of atonement expressed by the biblical writers under the inspiration of the Spirit, and the theories, often flawed, that later Christian thinkers attached to them.

Concern has been expressed that the role of the Cross and the atonement deserves greater emphasis than it often receives. It is hoped that fresh explorations into the love of Christ will infuse the Church with greater vigor and serve as a catalyst that rallies the whole Church to fulfill the Great Commission.

Accordingly, the committee recommends that the 2013 General Assembly call upon the various institutions of the Church of the Nazarene to host and produce studies, conferences, and writings aimed at expounding the concept of atonement, thereby enriching the Church’s comprehension and faith.

AFFIRMATION

We want to affirm that doctrine necessarily leads to practical living, orthodoxy should be translated into orthopraxy. Scholarly study is an aid to the faith and life of the body of believers. We are called to live by the Gospel of Christ as the unfathomable expression of God’s holy love. While scholars study these great truths, the Church is responsible to live by the light we now have. Wesleyans have always been a people with practical soteriology, both heart and life, and deep concern for evangelism and compassionate ministries.

In speaking about the death of Christ and the atonement, the Bible reveals the reality of grace reconciling an alienated mankind to God, bringing us to peace with God, and thus making us part of the new creation (Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 1:19-22). Without missing a beat the Scripture affirms that Christ broke down the dividing wall between peoples, making them one, and so urges the Church to live out this life and ministry of reconciliation in its fullness (Ephesians 4:1-6; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 17-21).

Consequently we call upon our local churches to heed a dual charge: believe that Christ’s death reconciled man, and live the life of a people reconciled by grace. Peace with our God and Father shapes our corporate prayer life which in turn touches both the visible and invisible world,

empowers our willingness to forgive one another, and motivates the way we share our possessions and our lives. It also makes us evangelizing ambassadors of Christ in the world (2 Corinthians 5:20), and peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) speaking with a prophetic voice.

The Cape Town Commitment declaration deserves our full attention and commitment when it says:

Reconciliation to God and to one another is also the foundation and motivation for seeking the justice that God requires, without which, God says, there can be no peace. True and lasting reconciliation requires acknowledgment of past and present sin, repentance before God, confession to the injured one, and the seeking and receiving of forgiveness. It also includes commitment by the Church to seeking justice or reparation, where appropriate, for those who have been harmed by violence and oppression.

We long to see the worldwide Church of Christ, those who have been reconciled to God, living out our reconciliation with one another and committed to the task and struggle of biblical peace-making in the name of Christ.¹⁸

Respectfully submitted,

SCRIPTURE STUDY COMMITTEE

Thomas King, Chairperson

Alexander Varughese, Secretary

¹⁸ *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action* (The Lausanne Movement, 2011).