



STATEMENT DM-610

THE FALSE GOD AND GOSPEL OF MORAL GOVERNMENT THEOLOGY

by E. Calvin Beisner

Summary

Moral government theology (MGT), rooted in the philosophical definition of freedom as the "power of contrary choice," denies the fundamental Christian doctrines of God's perfection in knowledge, goodness, and power; original sin; human moral inability; the substitutionary satisfaction of God's justice in Christ's atoning death; redemption; and justification by the crediting of Christ's righteousness to believers by grace through faith apart from works. As documented in this article, these denials are unbiblical and are so serious as to warrant classifying MGT as non-Christian.

Judy was a former missionary whose faith had collapsed; she no longer believed that God was unchangeably good or faithful or that He even knew all of the future. George (both names have been changed) was another former missionary who ardently rejected the historic belief that Adam's sin and guilt are shared in by the whole human race. What tied the two together? Both had been taught the same doctrinal system in training with a popular youth mission organization in the 1970s. In one, it brought depression; in the other, pride. Both effects, strangely enough, were fitting.

Since the 1960s, a new heretical theology has been infiltrating evangelical circles. Not *officially* embraced by any well-known denomination or parachurch organization, the system has nevertheless made serious inroads into at least one large and well-known missions organization and has spawned a ministry and publication dedicated to its promotion and defense.¹ This system of doctrine is paradoxically old and new: its elements are old,² but the manner in which they are tied together into a complete structure is new.

THE RISE OF MORAL GOVERNMENT THEOLOGY

The system's major proponents dub it moral government theology. But today's moral government theology is a far cry from what went by that name two centuries ago, when people as diverse as Jonathan Edwards (a firm Calvinist) and John Wesley (a firm Arminian) both used it to refer to God's government of moral agents through His moral law as contrasted with His government of the physical creation through physical law.

Contemporary moral government theology is principally the brainchild of the late Gordon C. Olson. During the 1930s and 1940s, Olson's studies led him to believe that God's foreknowledge is necessarily limited by human free will and that the classical doctrines of original sin, human depravity and moral inability, the Atonement, and justification were as wrong as the classical doctrine of absolute foreknowledge.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Olson and an engineering associate of his named Harry Conn began to teach moral government theology for various mission organizations, often in recruiting, motivating, or training young people. Moral government theology (hereafter MGT) first began to spread rapidly when Olson and Conn became regular speakers for Youth With A Mission (YWAM), which has since become one of the larger youth missionary

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organizations in the world. Contrary to YWAM's repeated denials that MGT was an important part of its teaching, it was in YWAM training that tens of thousands of students from the late 1970s through the 1980s, and some even into the 1990s, learned MGT (although today some YWAM leaders speak against MGT).³

Although Conn and others have published on MGT,⁴ Olson's writings and taped lectures have been definitive of the system and the most important influence in the movement.⁵ For that reason, most of this analysis will focus on Olson's writings.⁶

ROOT AND BRANCHES

At the root of MGT lies a philosophical assumption about freedom. According to Olson, "the power to the contrary is essential to free agency — A free moral agent may always act contrary to any influence, not destructive to his freedom, that may be brought to bear upon him."⁷ Indeed, "voluntary responsible action involves the possibility of non-compliance or of contrary choice — the freedom of uncertainty. Virtuous action must be voluntary action. If no contrary choice, then no virtuous choice...."⁸ No choice may be called virtuous, then, unless the one who made it might just as well have chosen the opposite. Add to this philosophical definition of freedom the assertion that God and man are inherently free, and important doctrines necessarily follow.

First, man is born *morally neutral* and is always capable of choosing whether to sin. Olson insists that "holiness and sin are free voluntary acts of will or states of mind, and, although strongly influenced, are not caused by any internal force of nature, tendency, or instinct"; that "sin is not...an abstract thing which invades and lodges somewhere in our personalities, but is rather an orderly sequence of wrong choices and conduct"; that "depravity strongly influences, but does not compel, toward wrong action. We choose to follow our inclinations when we sin"; that "moral depravity...is always a voluntary development which results from the wrong choices of our wills"; that "the universality of sin in the world is not to be accounted for, therefore, by some fixed causation in our personality inherited by birth"; and that "so-called inability is a question of 'will not' rather than 'cannot' obey God's reasonable requirements."⁹

Each person is hence condemned only for *his or her own* sin. For Olson, "a contradiction would exist in the Bible if any statement could be found declaring our guilt for Adam's sin."¹⁰ In his view, "if the Bible affirmed that we are held accountable for other's (*sic*) sins, and particularly for Adam's sin, this would become such a gross injustice in the economy of God as to erect a barrier to intelligent thought and the meaning of guilt."¹¹ Why? Because "all sin consists in sinning — there can be no moral character but in moral acts."¹²

Second, man's future free choices cannot be foreknown by God; if they were then they would no longer be free. The "future choices of moral beings," Olson writes, "when acting freely in their moral agency, have not been brought into existence as yet and thus are not fixities or objects of possible knowledge."¹³ Thus, "many Bible passages, when taken in their natural meaning, appear to indicate that God does not have absolute foreknowledge over all his own future actions, nor over all those of His moral creatures."¹⁴ Therefore God's foreknowledge is limited, and He learns new things as people make choices.

Third, the principle of contrary choice "applies to actions of the Godhead as well as to the self-caused actions of men."¹⁵ Therefore: (1) God cannot foreknow His own future choices, for if He did then He would not make those choices freely, and He would cease to be a moral agent. (2) God's moral character, like man's, depends constantly on His choices: "Moral attributes involve the element of choice, or have a voluntary causation to them. They are not natural attributes in that they are not endowments of God's existence, but are moral in the sense that they are the result of a disposition of will. They exist *because each Member of the Godhead perpetually chooses that they should be so*. Moral character must be an active something. It cannot be a static fixity of some sort back of the will, causing its actions" (emphasis added).¹⁶ Hence, the absolutely unfettered will, not the moral nature, lies at the root of God's (or any moral agent's) choices and character. This follows necessarily from Olson's first principle, already cited: "Voluntary responsible action involves the possibility of non-compliance or of contrary choice — the freedom of uncertainty....If no contrary choice, then no virtuous choice...."¹⁷

The shocking implication of this last idea — that God is morally changeable — might appear to contradict another of Olson's statements: "God's nature and moral character imposes limitations. God is able to do whatever He wills (except with moral beings [*sic*]), but His will is limited to doing those things which are in harmony with His wise

and holy and perfect character. God cannot do things contrary to Himself. This is not a defect in Divine omnipotence but a perfection of the Divine Being."¹⁸

But Olson chooses his terms carefully. "Moral character," he says, "is dynamic; it is the whole personality in action; it is what we are doing with our endowments or abilities of personality and the moral understanding which we possess."¹⁹ If it is true that Olson believes that God's "*will* is limited to doing those things which are in harmony with His wise and holy and perfect *character*" (emphasis added),²⁰ it is also true that Olson believes God's *character* "cannot be a static fixity of some sort back of the will, causing its actions," but "is the whole personality in action; it is what [God is] doing with [His] endowments or abilities of personality and the moral understanding which [He] possess[es]."²¹

As Olson puts it, "*the will determines the nature or character, rather than the nature the will*" (emphasis added).²² Should God ever choose to make His character other than wise and holy and perfect — and no "internal force of nature" can prevent His doing so — then of course that wise and holy and perfect character will no longer limit what He wills; a different sort of character will do so. To put it simply, we have no *assurance* that God will not decide tomorrow to become the Devil.

Not only God's knowledge and moral character but even His *power* collapses before the inexorable implications of human autonomy in MGT. Olson hints at this in a parenthetical phrase in his statement of the limits on God's will, cited above: "God is able to do whatever He wills (*except with moral beings*), but His will is limited to doing those things which are in harmony with His wise and holy and perfect character" (emphasis added).²³ He makes it explicit when he writes, "Man as an endowed moral being has been given the ability to *limit the omnipotence of God* in his sphere of life. Mankind by their rebellion against God and their obstinacy in refusing the mercy and forgiveness through the atoning death of Christ have imposed very great limitations upon God's will and happiness....God in creating moral creatures with *the power of contrary choice* made this a possibility" (emphasis added).²⁴

The implications of these ideas do not end here. They yield a whole new understanding of justification and salvation as well. Since Olson explicitly denies that man inherits sin or guilt from Adam (i.e., he denies the doctrine of original sin — the imputation of Adam's sin and guilt to his posterity), it should come as no surprise that he also denies the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers. He finds the cause of salvation not in Christ's atoning death but in the believer's self-reformation: "Romans 5:12-19 does not establish the dogma of the literal imputation of Adam's sin to all his posterity, but merely affirms in a parallelism that just as Adam's sin was the occasion, not cause, of the voluntary disobedience of all men, so Christ is the occasion, not cause, of the salvation offered to all men."²⁵ "The active obedience or holiness of Christ," Olson says, "is not legally imputed to the believer."²⁶ And if Christ's righteousness is not credited to the believer, neither is the believer's sin credited to Christ on the cross. For sin is not a principle; sins are isolated, individual acts only.

But if our sins are not borne by Christ on the cross, how are we to be freed from the penalty due them? Ah, the question assumes that a penalty is due, but none is! "A voluntary disposition of mercy and forgiveness prevails equally among all the Members of the Godhead. The Godhead is without personal vindictiveness. The problems of forgiveness are not personal but governmental. God does not require an exact payment for sin to satisfy *retributive* justice, but only requires that an atonement shall satisfy *public* justice and all the problems of a full and free reconciliation in His government of moral beings."²⁷

This denial of any demand for the satisfaction of retributive (or "vindictive") justice in God leads Olson to deny that Christ's atoning death was the true payment of a penalty to satisfy that justice:

The sacrifice of Christ is not the payment of a debt, nor is it a complete satisfaction of justice for sin. It is a Divinely-appointed [*sic*] condition which precedes the forgiveness of sin....Christ's sufferings *took the place of a penalty*, so that His sufferings have the same effect in reconciling God to man, and procuring the forgiveness of sin, that the sinner's endurance of the punishment due to his sins would have had. The sufferings of Christ were *not a substituted penalty, but a substitute for a penalty* (emphasis added).²⁸

The atonement of Christ "rendered satisfaction to public justice (a demonstration before all that rebellion against authority will be punished), as distinguished from retributive or vindictive justice."²⁹

Here, then, is MGT in a nutshell:

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- (1) Freedom entails the power of contrary choice, and God and man are both free.
- (2) God is finite, imperfect, and changeable in His knowledge, character, and power, and He does not require vengeance for sin.
- (3) Man is perfectly free, which implies that he cannot have inherited either sin or a morally corrupt nature from Adam, and his freedom necessarily limits God's knowledge, will, and power.
- (4) The gospel is that "the atoning death of Christ," as Olson deigns to call it — nay, even Christ Himself — "is the occasion, not cause, of the salvation offered to all men."³⁰ The "consequences of right and wrong moral action" in MGT "are based *solely upon personal merit or demerit* as known only to God" and "are and will be in exact accord or in proportion to merit and demerit" (emphasis added).³¹

By defining freedom as the "power of contrary choice," Olson is forced ultimately to deny nearly the whole defining body of Christian faith: original sin, unregenerate man's moral inability, the imputation of Christ's righteousness in justification (parallel to the imputation of Adam's sin in condemnation), the substitutionary and satisfactory atonement for sin in Christ's death, and the moral and intellectual infinity, perfection, and immutability of God. And Olson reaches his conclusions not on the basis of Scripture but by inferences from philosophical assumptions. What might Olson have found had he subjected his first principle and his inferences to the light of Scripture?

HUMAN FREEDOM AND SIN IN SCRIPTURE

Scripture knows nothing of freedom as the "power of contrary choice." Real freedom is not autonomy but deliverance *from* the slavery to sin in which all humans are born, *into* the glorious freedom of the children of God: "But thanks be to God that though you *were* slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you *became* slaves of righteousness" (Rom. 6:17-18, emphases added). Try as he might, man never can escape being Number Two — *he must always be someone's slave*. The serpent's trickery was to make Adam and Eve think that by disobeying God they could begin to rule their own lives — they could be Number One. Instead, rejecting God's rule only meant embracing Satan's (Eph. 2:2). "But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:22-23).

Far from human freedom being the "power of contrary choice," the very exercise of that power robbed human beings of the only freedom for which we were made: the freedom of obedience to our rightful Sovereign. And no "power of contrary choice" in us will ever free us from sin's tyranny, for we are "dead in trespasses and sins" and "by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:1, 3). We suffer, as Luther put it in the title of one of his most famous books, from *The Bondage of the Will*; our wills are bound to our corrupt, rebellious, sinful nature inherited from Adam.³²

What we need is not a free will but a new, holy, obedient, righteous nature (2 Cor. 5:17) to which our will can be bound. And we cannot produce that new nature for ourselves — least of all by an act of our own will, which is bound by the contrary nature. Dead, rebellious humans do not — *cannot* — repent, believe, and reform their lives.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, *even when we were dead in our transgressions*, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:4-10, emphasis added)

DIVINE KNOWLEDGE, HOLINESS, AND JUSTICE IN SCRIPTURE

Far from divine freedom being the "power of contrary choice," God's freedom is precisely that He never will or even can do anything contrary to His holy and good nature. "Thou *art good* and *doest good*" (Ps. 119:68). That is why God "cannot lie" (Titus 1:2); why we know that His promise and His purpose are "unchangeable" and therefore that

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"it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:17-18); why God could rest His assurance to Israel on His own immutability when He said, "For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6); why we can be comforted to know that "if we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13; cf. Num. 23:19).

Like His moral nature, so also God's knowledge is perfect, admitting no increase or improvement. "God...knows all things" (1 John 3:20) — not just *some* things; not all things *except* those that "have not been brought into existence as yet and thus are not fixities or objects of possible knowledge" (Olson's description of the future choices of free moral agents).³³ The God who "calls those things which do not exist as though they did" (Rom. 4:17) "knows *all* things." Nothing can be hid from God (Ps. 139:11-12; Heb. 4:13). "His understanding is infinite" (Ps. 147:5). Hence God's knowledge can never increase (Isa. 40:13-14), for it is already all-comprehensive: (1) in space (2 Chron. 16:9; Ps. 139:1-2, 6-10); (2) in time (Ps. 139:15-16; Isa. 41:21-26; John 13:19); (3) in scope, including all things from the greatest to the least (Ps. 139:2-4; 147:4; Job 31:4; Matt. 10:30); and (4) not only in things actual (what is or *will be*) but also in things contingent (what *could* be, under any circumstances, real or not) (1 Sam. 23:10-13; Ps. 81:13-16; Jer. 38:17-18, cf. 19-23; Matt. 11:20-24).

This God of infinite and unchangeable knowledge and holiness is also a God of perfect justice who, contrary to Olson, *does* demand vengeance on sin: "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me..." (Exod. 20:5, cf. 20:7; Deut. 29:19-20; 32:35; Josh. 24:19-20; Nah. 1:2-3; Rom. 12:19).

THE GOSPEL OF REDEMPTION AND JUSTIFICATION

Thank God that although "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," we are "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a *propitiation* [i.e., *satisfaction* of man's debt to God's outraged holiness] in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:23-26, emphasis added).

This redemption by Christ is truly a *payment* of our penalty for sin, Olson's denials notwithstanding: "You were not redeemed with perishable things...but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7). The Holy Spirit "is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession" (Eph. 1:14). Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed" (Titus 2:14). For this reason Christ is praised: "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

In His atoning death, Christ truly substituted Himself for us in bearing the penalty for our sins: "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). He was offered up "to bear the sins of many" (Heb. 9:28), "the just for the unjust" {that is, the just "in the stead of, as a substitute for" the unjust³⁴} (1 Pet. 3:18), "a ransom³⁵ for³⁶ all" who would be saved (1 Tim. 2:6).

Just as surely as He gave Himself to bear our sins, Christ also gives us the gift of His righteousness:

For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. (Rom. 5:17-19)

And we obtain this gift of righteousness not by works but solely by faith: "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them

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but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Phil. 3:8-9; cf. Rom. 4:3-6).

MINOR ABERRATION OR DEPARTURE FROM THE FAITH?

Proponents of MGT often depict opposition to it as rooted in "hyper-Calvinism," claiming that their doctrines are nothing but Wesleyan Arminianism, which is recognized in evangelical circles as a nonheretical option in theology. Not so.

Neither Wesley nor Arminius would ever have dreamed of denying God's absolute and infinite foreknowledge or His unchangeable goodness. Wesley boldly defended God's foreknowledge in commenting on John 6:64,³⁷ and both God's foreknowledge and His moral immutability in his sermon on "Divine Providence."³⁸ Moreover, he confidently taught that Christ's "divine righteousness belongs to his divine nature....Now this is his eternal, essential, *immutable*, holiness; his infinite justice, mercy, and truth: in all which, He and the Father are one" (emphasis added).³⁹ And Arminius's words rejecting the notion that God is *freely* good breathe fire:

[Some] brought forward an instance, or example, in which [they alleged that] Necessity and Liberty met together; and that was God, who is both necessarily and freely good. This assertion of theirs displeased me so exceedingly, as to cause me to say, that it was *not far removed from blasphemy*. At this time, I entertain a similar opinion about it; and in a few words I thus prove its *falsity, absurdity*, and the *blasphemy* [contained] *in the falsity*....[T]he Christian Fathers justly attached blasphemy to those who said, "the Father begat the Son *willingly*, or by his own will;" because from this it would follow, that the Son had [*principium*] an origin similar to that of the creatures. But with how much greater equity does blasphemy fasten itself upon those who declare, "that God is *freely* good!" (emphases added)⁴⁰

Both Wesley and Arminius clearly affirmed that all human beings (except Christ) inherit the sin and guilt of Adam and therefore are naturally bound to sin until regenerated by God. "This, therefore, is the first grand distinguishing point between Heathenism and Christianity," wrote Wesley. He continued:

The one acknowledges that many men are infected with many vices, and even born with a proneness to them; but supposes withal, that in some the natural good much over balances the evil: the other declares that all men are "conceived in sin," and "shapen in wickedness" — that hence there is in every man a "carnal mind," which is enmity against God; which is not, cannot be, subject to "his law"; which so infects the whole soul, that "there dwelleth in" him "in his flesh," in his natural state, "no good thing"; but "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is evil," only evil, and that "continually."

Hence we may learn that all who deny this, call it "original sin," or by any other title, are but Heathens still, in the fundamental point which differences Heathenism from Christianity....But here is the shibboleth: Is man by nature filled with all manner of evil? Is he void of all good? Is he wholly fallen? Is his soul totally corrupted? Or, to come back to the text, is "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart only evil continually?"

Allow this, and you are so far a Christian. Deny it, and you are but a Heathen still.⁴¹

In like manner Arminius insisted:

The whole of this sin, however, is not peculiar to our first parents, but is common to the entire race and to all their posterity, who, at the time when this sin was committed, were in their loins, and who have since descended from them by the natural mode of propagation, according to the primitive benediction. For in Adam "all have sinned." [Romans 5:12] Wherefore, whatever punishment was brought down upon our first parents, has likewise pervaded and yet pursues all their posterity. So that all men "are by nature the children of wrath," [Ephesians 2:3]....⁴²

Arminius wrote elsewhere that

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in his *lapsed and sinful state*, man is not capable, of and by himself, either to think, to will, or to do that which is really good; but it is necessary for him to be regenerated and renewed in his intellect, affections or will, and in all his powers, by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, that he may be qualified rightly to understand, esteem, consider, will, and perform whatever is truly good. When he is made a partaker of this regeneration or renovation, I consider that, since he is delivered from sin, he is capable of thinking, willing and doing that which is good, but yet *not without the continued aids of Divine Grace*. (emphasis added)⁴³

Both Wesley and Arminius affirmed the substitutionary, penal satisfaction doctrine of the atoning death of Christ. In commenting on Romans 3:25, Wesley wrote that Christ's propitiatory sacrifice was made to "appease an offended God. But if, as some teach, God never was offended, there was no need of this propitiation. And if so, Christ died in vain."⁴⁴

In explaining the priestly office of Christ, Arminius wrote that by it God exercised both His love for humanity and His love for justice, united to which is a hatred against sin. It was the will of God that each of these kinds of love should be satisfied. He gave satisfaction to his *love for the creature* who was a sinner, when he gave up his Son who might act the part of Mediator. But he rendered **satisfaction** to his *love for justice and to his hatred against sin*, when he imposed on his Son the office of Mediator by the shedding of his blood and by the suffering of death; [Heb. 2:10; 5:8, 9] and he was unwilling to admit him as the Intercessor for sinners except when sprinkled with his own blood, in which he might be made [*expiatio*] the **propitiation** for sins. [Heb. 9:12]...In this respect also it may with propriety be said that God rendered satisfaction to himself, and appeased himself in "the Son of his love" (italicized emphases in original, boldfaced emphases added).⁴⁵

Both Wesley and Arminius affirmed that we are justified by God's crediting the righteousness of Christ to our account as a gift through faith apart from works. Commenting on Romans 5:14, Wesley wrote, "As the sin of Adam, without the sins which we afterward committed, brought us death; so the righteousness of Christ, without the good works which we afterward performed, brings us life...."⁴⁶ Arminius similarly wrote, "I believe that sinners are accounted righteous solely by the obedience of Christ; and that the righteousness of Christ is the only meritorious cause on account of which God pardons the sins of believers and reckons them as righteous as if they had perfectly fulfilled the law."⁴⁷

In each of these points, MGT stands in stark contradiction not only to Arminius and Wesley but also to the great creeds and doctrinal statements of every branch of Protestantism⁴⁸ and, most important, to Scripture. If Wesley, the great champion of Christian tolerance and catholicity, could treat rejection of the doctrines of original sin and moral inability as sufficient by itself to define one as "a Heathen still," surely MGT, which makes not only this grave error but also many others graver still, must be classified not as a form of Christianity but as heathenism masquerading as Christianity.

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NOTES

¹ Evangelistic Education Ministries (3625 Halsted Road, Rockford, IL, 61101), publishers of *Notes and Quotes*, a newsletter "proclaiming the Moral Government of God," edited by Dean Harvey.

² It combines some of the teachings of the fifth-century monk Pelagius, who was opposed principally by Augustine and condemned by the ecumenical councils of Carthage (a.d. 418) and Ephesus (a.d. 431), the 16th-century philosopher Faustus Socinus, the 19th-century revivalist Charles G. Finney, and various others.

³ For thorough documentation that MGT has been a widespread and often central element of YWAM training, see Alan W. Gomes, *Lead Us Not into Deception: A Biblical Examination of Moral Government Theology*, 3d rev. ed. (La Mirada, CA: published by the author, 1986), Appendices A and B. At least during the 1970s and the early 1980s, MGT was the dominant theological perspective at every YWAM training base around the world that Gomes and I, with the help of many contacts both inside and outside YWAM, were able to check. As well, many of YWAM's most respected teachers, both on and off staff, taught MGT, according to firsthand testimony by YWAM

students.

⁴ E.g., Harry Conn, *Four Trojan Horses* (Nyack, NY: Parson Publishing, 1978), especially chapter 3 and appendices 1 and 2; Harry Conn, ed., *Finney's Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976); Howard Roy Elseth, *Did God Know?* (St. Paul: Calvary United Church, 1977); Winkie Pratney, *Youth Aflame* (n.p., 1970; rev. ed., Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1983); Winkie Pratney, *The Nature and Character of God: The Magnificent Doctrine of God in Understandable Language* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1988); George Otis, Jr., *The God They Never Knew* (Van Nuys, CA: Bible Voice Publishers, 1978). Also important is the tape series, "The Moral Government of God," by Harry Conn, produced for some time by YWAM.

⁵ Most important among Olson's writings has been his evangelism training manual, *Sharing Your Faith: The 3 M's of Witnessing: The Messenger, The Message, The Method*, 4th rev. ed. (Chicago: Bible Research Fellowship, 1976), republished with very little alteration as *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (Franklin Park, IL: Bible Research Fellowship, 1980). See also his 40-tape lecture series, "The Messenger, the Message and Method of Sharing Your Faith." Other important publications by Olson include *The Entrance of Sin into the World* (Minneapolis: Men for Missions, 1973), *Holiness and Sin* (Minneapolis: Men for Missions, 1971), and *The Moral Government of God*, 3d rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Men for Missions, 1974).

⁶ For extensive citations from other MGT proponents in a longer critique of the system, see E. Calvin Beisner, *The Heresy of Moral Government Theology* (Sunnyvale, CA: Coalition on Revival, 1989, 1990). For a more extensive critique specifically of MGT's rejection of God's foreknowledge, see Beisner, "The Omniscience of God: Biblical Doctrine and Answers to Objections," *Crosswinds: The Reformation Digest* 2:1 (Spring/Summer 1993), 10-26. Copies of both are available from the author at \$5 each prepaid (4409 Alabama Avenue, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 37409).

⁷ Olson, *Sharing Your Faith* (henceforth *Sharing*), W-Me-IV-7. (Olson uses this page numbering system in both *Sharing* and *The Truth Shall Make You Free*.)

⁸ Olson, *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (henceforth *Truth*), T-V-1.

⁹ *Truth*, T-V-1; T-V-3; T-VI-5; T-VI-6; *Sharing*, W-Me-IV-4-5; W-Me-VIII-6.

¹⁰ *Sharing*, W-Me-IV-5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, W-Me-VII-3.

¹² *Ibid.*, unnumbered page opposite W-Me-IV-6.

¹³ *Truth*, T-III-13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, T-III-18.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, T-III-13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, T-III-23.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, T-V-1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, T-III-22.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, T-III-23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, T-III-22.

²¹ *Ibid.*, T-III-23.

²² Olson, *Holiness and Sin*, 24.

²³ *Truth*, T-III-22.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, T-VI-8.

²⁶ *Sharing*, "Historical Opinions," 2.

²⁷ *Truth*, T-VII-4.

²⁸ "Historical Opinions as to the Nature of Christ's Atoning Death," 3, in *Truth*, page following T-VII-10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, T-VIII-4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, T-VI-8.

³¹ *Ibid.*, T-IV-11.

³² Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. Henry Cole (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976); also in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, ed. E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969).

³³ *Truth*, T-III-13.

³⁴ The Greek word *huper*, here translated *for*, conveys, in contexts like this, the sense of substitution. See A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 630-31; A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933), 6:115-16; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966), 156.

³⁵ Greek: *antitutron*, literally, "a substituted payment."

³⁶ Greek: *huper*, "in the place of"; see note no. 34 above.

³⁷ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 15th ed. (New York: Carlton & Porter, n.d.), 232.

³⁸ By *John Wesley: A Modern Reader's Introduction to the Man and his Message...*, ed. T. Otto Nall (New York: Association Press, 1961), 20-21; extract from the sermon, "Divine Providence," in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. John Emory (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1916), 2:99-107.

³⁹ By *John Wesley*, 62-63; extracted from Wesley's sermon, "The Lord of Righteousness," in *Standard Sermons of John Wesley*, 2:426-27.

⁴⁰ Arminius, *Apology Against Thirty-one Defamatory Articles*, Article XXII, in *The Writings of James Arminius*, 3 vols., trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 1:344-46.

⁴¹ By *John Wesley*, 29-30; extracted from Wesley's sermon, "Original Sin," in *Standard Sermons of John Wesley*, 2:222-25.

⁴² Arminius, *Public Disputations*, VII, XV-XVI, in *Writings of James Arminius*, 1:485-86.

⁴³ Arminius, *Declaration of Sentiments*, III, in *Writings of James Arminius*, 1:252-53.

⁴⁴ Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 370.

⁴⁵ Arminius, *Public Disputations*, XIV, XVI, in *Writings of James Arminius*, 1:560.

⁴⁶ Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, 375.

⁴⁷ Arminius, *Declaration of Sentiments*, IX, in *Writings of James Arminius*, 1:264.

⁴⁸ I have cited these at great length in point-by-point opposition to the primary tenets of MGT in *The Heresy of Moral Government Theology*.