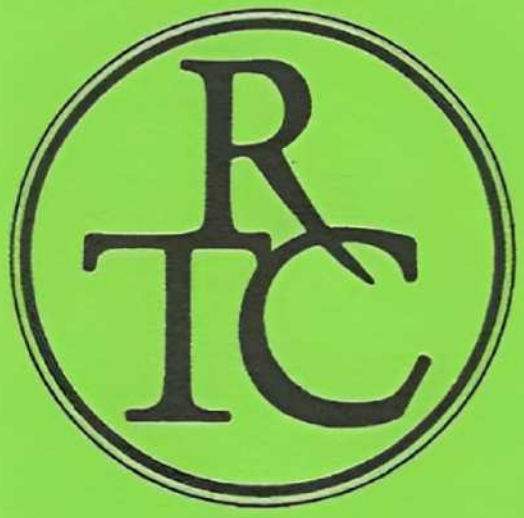

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SOLA SCRIPTURA

Christianity in its historic creeds and confessions has always regarded the Bible as the inspired record of a divine revelation which can be found nowhere else. In this Christianity has accepted the claims which the Bible makes for itself. The Bible is not the only divine revelation, nor is it primary revelation, for "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork." But the Bible is the supreme revelation and as such is specially designed to meet man's need as a sinner. It will be urged, no doubt, that God has revealed Himself supremely in Jesus Christ, and in personal terms that is true, for in Him we see the eternal Word made flesh. Yet the Word incarnate does not add to the Word written. He is its subject and its fulfilment, and in a real sense He is its Author (Col. 3 : 16).

We must, therefore, avoid the tendency to quote an actual saying of our Lord as if it had greater authority than other parts of the Bible. Those who do so are usually selective when dealing with our Lord's recorded sayings, showing that their authority is not the Jesus from Whom they quote, but the humanistic principle by which their selection is made.

Those who would shun such a procedure and insist that all Scripture is equally authoritative must be careful to act consistently with their declared position. Not infrequently we notice a distinctly disturbing tendency to speculation in theological matters, which is virtually an attempt to be wise (!) beyond what is written. If we would be committed to the Reformed Faith, we must avoid such a tendency. As a Reformed Journal we allow reasonable liberty in the exposition of that Faith, but in no way does this imply any departure from the principle of *Sola Scriptura. Quod non est biblicum, non est theologicum* (what is not Biblical is not theological). Doctrine that is not founded upon this axiom does not deserve the name of Christian theology.

F. S. L.

CALVIN, GENEVA, AND CHRISTIAN MISSION

by J. Douglas MacMillan

J. Douglas MacMillan is Professor of Church History and Church Principles in the College of the Free Church of Scotland, Edinburgh.

As the sun sank over Geneva on Saturday, 27th May, 1564, another occurrence was to give this daily happening a striking and strongly symbolic significance; John Calvin died in the city which, although only his by adoption, is forever linked with his name.

It was of the coincidence of these two events that Theodore Beza, Calvin's friend and biographer as well as his theological colleague and successor, made imaginative use as he pointed out the significance to the whole Reformed movement of Calvin's removal from the scene.

> Thus in the same moment that day the sun set and the greatest light which was in this world, for the direction of the Church of God, was withdrawn to Heaven. We can well say that with this single man it has pleased God, in our time, to teach us the way both to live well and to die well. [1]

This high evaluation of Calvin's importance to his times is no empty eulogy. No matter how men may appraise his work, there is absolutely no questioning his significance for the theological world of his own day and since. Nor is the tribute to his example in life and death merely the hollow compliment of friendly kindness. Few men have been so single-mindedly industrious as Calvin. Fewer still have achieved so much in a lifetime, despite the fact that he died almost two months before his fifty-fifth birthday. If faith in God, commitment to Christ, compassion for one's fellows and a massive contribution to spiritual enlightenment are factors to be weighed in assessing what it is to "live well", then Beza was right; Calvin *did* live well.

Beza was also right when he said that Calvin died well. Death had come slowly, lingeringly, painfully. Rumours of his dying had been filtering out of Geneva for months. However, although plagued by a fearsome catalogue of illnesses, and terribly enfeebled in body from the beginning of the year, his mind had remained sharp and clear, his confidence in God strong and sure. He had worked to the last and, until death came, his concern was for the cause in which he had spent his years and his strength. His final statements on the Christian faith and directions for the Christian Church are in perfect harmony with those which characterise his entire Christian profession and are shot through, not merely with warm devotion to God, but with a driving concern for the good of the whole Reformed constituency and the furtherance of the gospel.

That Calvin was deeply committed to spreading the truths he believed should not seem strange to any of us. What may startle us is the thought that such commitment invites attention to him in the rather unexpected, and largely unexplored, role of evangelist. An upsurge of scholarly interest in this aspect of his work at Geneva has taken place over recent years and has produced some fascinating details of his accomplishments in the sphere of evangelism. The emerging picture kindles a new awareness of his place in the history of Christian missions and exhibits his work in Geneva as one of the finest examples of effective outreach in the history of the Church. This, in turn, calls for a fresh evaluation of his theological perspectives and, in some areas, a radical review of various interpretations, and misrepresentations, of the man and his actual beliefs.

Calvin's Theology and its Motivation to Mission

The problems with which Calvin had to grapple over the closing months of his life touched many lands, but those of one specific country took particular prominence for him, as they had done for many years. This was France, his own homeland. Right up until the end, Calvin kept receiving information about, and commenting upon, political happenings there. To the end his advice was sought by, and given to, the Protestants of France on how to cope with a situation which, in Church and State, was becoming increasingly intolerant of their life and witness. Those concerns of a dying man prompt questions about how they became part of his life and why

they weighed so heavily on his mind even in the face of death. The search for an answer leads directly to his theology.

It was in 1536 that the first edition of Calvin's great theological work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion,* was published. The work provided a clear presentation of Reformed doctrine, linked it back into the writings of the early Church fathers, and showed that all its leading tenets were drawn from Scripture. It also carried a powerful apologetic in defence of the historic Christian faith. The apologetic aim is seen in the way Calvin dedicated the book in his introductory Preface. It is couched in the form of a powerful plea to the King of France – then Francis I – on behalf of the persecuted believers in the land.

With its appearance, French Protestants were given a measured and meticulous exposition of their faith by which to refute misrepresentation and misconception; they were also provided with a handbook from which to evangelise and instruct others in the doctrines of biblical Christianity. The appearance of the book in this format, and at this juncture, alerts us to the fact that Calvin's work, even at this early stage of his life, was already deeply enmeshed with the spiritual welfare of his own countrymen.

This concern for mission has been overlooked in the traditions which have encrusted – and too often calcified around – the study of Calvin's life; mission has far too frequently been assumed to be absent because banished by the force of theological necessity. Dr. P. E. Hughes reflects the position accurately, even if he states it starkly :

> As for Calvin's theology, we are all familiar with the scornful rationalisation that facilely asserts that his horrible doctrine of divine election makes nonsense of all missionary and evangelistic activity.[2]

Here, Dr. Hughes highlights the truth that there has been a long-standing failure to appreciate, far less assess accurately, Calvin's conviction about or his involvement in missions because of a distorted view of his theology.

This failure traces back, in too many instances, to preconceived ideas about the man and his actual teaching. The notion has prevailed, and still does with people who do not read their Calvin directly, that his theology axiomatically excluded him and his

fellow ministers in Geneva from having any concern about, or interest in, a theology of mission. This conception runs counter to the historical facts and to entertain it is to misread both the situation at Geneva and the theology which inspired its circumstances.

Another writer, Professor David B. Calhoun, very cogently summarises the imbalance which has crept into the historical assessment of Calvin's theology and practice at this very point :

> The whole issue has been dismissed at times by the facile assertion that Calvin's doctrine of divine election makes nonsense of all missionary and evangelistic activity. At other times it has been misunderstood or distorted because of lack of a full definition of missions and the failure to study comprehensively both Calvin's missionary teaching and activity.[3]

His assessment is all too factual, and accentuates the need to subject this construction of Calvin's doctrine of election to careful analysis. Is it the case that Calvin construed his theology in such a way as to obviate any necessity of or obligation towards mission, because the elect would be brought into the Kingdom anyway? Careful and sympathetic scrutiny of his own writing, and intimate acquaintance with his enormously energetic activity, should have made it perfectly plain that this was never Calvin's own view of the matter. A systematic theologian *par excellence*, as all historians and theologians who have studied him allow, he is acknowledged as the outstanding systematiser of Reformed theology. His reputation here should alert us to the danger of assuming that he would easily fall into the one-sided view of this central doctrine which has so frequently been credited to him.

The fact is that comprehensive analysis of his own writings compels a very different opinion. For example, they articulate the continual danger of the Church, or of individuals, becoming complacent about evangelism precisely because of a wrong conception of this very article of the faith. He teaches that, since no man knows who the elect are, preachers must take it for granted that God wills all to be saved.[4] In practice, that must be the principle upon which the ministry of the Word operates.[5] Election belongs to a special category, the secret purpose of God, not to the evangelistic activity of the Church, which has no way of distinguishing between elect and reprobate. The Church must preach the gospel to men, not as elect, but as sinners;[6] for it is

one's believing response to the free offer of Christ in the gospel which reveals one's election.[7] Further, God opens doors before the Church that the Gospel might go into all the world so that His elect may hear it and respond in faith.[8]

The paradox between election and the free offer of the gospel – a paradox of which he is, of course, sharply aware – is never an embarrassment to his exegesis and his handling of Scripture. For example, in his comment on John 3 : 16, he says :

> God has employed the universal term *whosoever*, both to invite all indiscriminately to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such is also the import of the term *World*, which he formerly used; for though nothing will be found in the world that is worthy of the favour of God, yet he shows himself to be reconciled to the whole world, when he invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ, which is nothing else than an entrance into life.[9]

This is typical of the way in which he leaves the free offer completely unfettered. He is utterly confident that the preaching of the gospel will accomplish the divine purpose and that, through the gospel call being made powerful and effective by God, it will bring the elect to saving faith in Christ. However, he normally spells out the obverse implications of effectual calling as well, and his comment on this verse continues :

> Let us remember, on the other hand, that while *life* is promised universally to *all who believe* in Christ, still faith is not common to all. For Christ is made known and held out to the view of all, but the elect alone are they whose eyes God opens, that they may seek him by faith.[10]

This makes clear that vocation harmonises with, and is dictated by, election but that the latter does not circumscribe the freeness, nor impugn the integrity, of the gospel invitation to men as sinners. This is, in fact, the force of his comment on the opening phrase of the next verse, *For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world.*

> He came not to destroy; and therefore it follows that *all who believe* may obtain salvation by him. There is now no reason why any man should be in a state of hesitation, or of distressing anxiety, as to the manner in which he may escape death, when we believe that it was the purpose of God that Christ should deliver us from it. The word *world* is again repeated, that no man should think himself wholly excluded, if he only keep the road of faith.[11]

This fine, biblical, balance runs all through his writings and his theology of election was held in such a way that he felt bound to work and witness for the salvation of others with all his strength. While mission is God's work, it is also ours and we must be faithful in our prosecution of it. The desire for, and opportunity of, sending preachers into other nations is an argument and pledge of the love of God :

> Therefore, there is no question but that God doth visit that nation where his gospel is preached . . . the gospel doth not fall down, and, as it were, by chance, like rain out of the clouds, but is brought by the hands (and the ministry of men) whither it is sent from above.[12]

Calvin believed that the Church must faithfully discharge the commission to go "into all the world" with the gospel. In one of his sermons he says :

> . . . it is not enough for every man to occupy himself in the service of God; but our zeal must extend further, to the drawing of other men thereto . . . We must as much as lieth in us endeavour to draw all men on earth unto God . . .[13]

Calvin and his fellow pastors in Geneva had strong convictions about God being the sovereign Creator of all things and these also informed their attitudes towards and promotion of mission. Against the gnostic and mystic strands of teaching which persisted into the sixteenth century, Calvin taught that God had not abandoned Creation nor the world He had made. The opposite was true. God loved the work of His own hands and although evil had invaded it He would not absolve Himself of concern nor allow it to remain forever alienated from Himself. Not only mercy, grace and love but also righteousness, justice and holiness dictated that sin and evil must be dealt with. Calvin's teaching on redemption does have a particularistic and individual orientation : no one can doubt that. But it also has a comprehensive, cosmic thrust that should not be overlooked :

> God will restore the world, now fallen with mankind, into perfection . . . let us be content with this simple doctrine, that there shall be such a temperature, and such a decent order, that nothing shall appear either deformed or ruinous.[14]

In the view of Professor Standford Reid, a scholar who has given powerful stimulus to the study of Calvin and mission, this

specific ingredient in Calvin's thought had a powerful influence on our theme :

> In order to understand the missionary endeavours of Calvin and the Genevan Church, we must first of all comprehend the theological motivation which lay behind much of their effort to spread as widely as possible the teachings of the reformers. Basic to all their thinking was the doctrine of creation. The sovereign God has made all things, and they are, therefore, His. And although through man's sin alienation has taken place, it is the responsibility of those who are God's people to bring creation back to Him. This is the mission of the Church until Christ's return in glory.[15]

Calvin's Preaching and its Inspiration to Mission

Calvin not only taught that God had elected a people who should be saved but tha· He had also appointed the means by which their salvation wou be effected. The focal point of grace was, of course, Christ in the glory of his Person and the perfection of his work. But Christ must be made known and the means by which this was to be achieved was, chiefly, by a knowledge of God's word; men must hear the word; the gospel must be made known; this was the task of preaching : election, far from making gospel preaching a useless redundancy, ensured that it would lead to the very success at which all true preaching aims, the bringing of others into the kingdom of God and of Christ.

This was why he insisted that the visible church was of the utmost importance to the world and the spread of the gospel and why he asserted the primacy of preaching over against ritual and ceremony in the worship and activity of the Church. He himself, of course, gave his strength to preaching as few men have ever done, considering it to be his main business in life.

Holding high views of preaching, it is not strange that he should place a premium upon the training of suitable men for the preaching of the word and the work of evangelism : "the ordinary method of collecting a church," he says, "is by the outward voice of men; for though God might bring each person to himself by a secret influence, yet he employs the agency of men, that he may awaken in them an anxiety about the salvation of each other."[16] Standford Reid links those emphases in Calvin's teaching with his magnificent achievements in training and sending out ministers and evangelists :

> With this pattern of thought, it is not surprising that Calvin and those with him, looked out upon the world around them with a strong sense of responsibility to the many people in neighbouring lands who were seeking . . . Calls were constantly coming in for help . . . those who were in the places of leadership in the Genevan church saw them as God's opening of a door before them . . . Here was the mission placed at their hand, and to which they were prepared to respond with all their resources, both spiritual and material.[17]

Calvin's City and its Contribution to Mission

During the years of Calvin's settled ministry in Geneva, (1541–1564), the Reformation was struggling for its very existence throughout the lands of Europe. There was compelling need for providing, and maintaining, properly trained workers to carry on the task of spreading the gospel in France, the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary, the British Isles and other countries within reach.

Those needs were constantly being brought home to Calvin. From the early 1540's onward, Geneva became a city of refuge for the persecuted Protestants of other lands, and they flocked into it. It is calculated that at some periods during the 40's and 50's the population (estimated at between 10,000 and 15,000) probably doubled. Naturally enough, Calvin, himself a refugee from religious persecution, was tenderly sympathetic to people driven from their homelands because of their religious beliefs. And of course, in various ways Geneva benefited from their presence. Says Reid :

> Coming from very different countries and covering a wide social spectrum, they brought much new life and activity to Geneva.[18]

Amongst those who fled and found haven in Geneva were crowds of Calvin's own countrymen. He was thus always deeply aware of the religious and political situation in France and constant dealings with Christians from there must have whetted his concern and maintained his aspirations for the nation's religious reform at a consistently high pitch.

Calvin, however, saw his city as far more than a haven for refugees. He realised the enormous potential of the situation for preparing and sending out preachers and evangelists to the needy lands around him lands which he regarded, from the spiritual

aspect, as being "fields white unto harvest." Commenting on this P. E. Hughes writes :

> . . . it was also a school – "the most perfect school of Christ which has been seen on earth since the days of the apostles," according to the estimate of the great Scottish Reformer John Knox, who himself found refuge and schooling in Geneva. Here able and dedicated men, whose faith had been tried in the fires of persecution, were trained and built up in the doctrine of the gospel at the feet of John Calvin, the supreme teacher of the Reformation.[19]

That Calvin was fully alive to the doors of opportunity opened in this way, we can have no doubt. In a letter to Henry Bullinger, for example, he explicitly links Geneva and evangelistic mission when he writes :

> . . . when I consider how very important this corner is for the propagation of the kingdom of Christ, I have good reason to be anxious that it should be carefully watched over . . .[20]

This passionate concern that the gospel should reach out to the world from Geneva is reflected in a sermon on I Timothy 3 : 4 :

> May we attend to what God has enjoined upon us, that He would be pleased to show His grace, not only to one city or a little handful of people, but that He would reign over all the world; that everyone may serve and worship Him in truth.

Geneva was, geographically, superbly situated to be a training centre equipping evangelists for the Reformed Church in France. It was only through Geneva that Protestants could find a reasonably safe entrance into that country, ringed around as it was by Spain, Savoy, Lorraine and the Spanish Netherlands, all firmly under the control of strongly reactionary Romanist leaders.

Politically the city had a powerful military ally, the Republic of Berne, warding off fears of military intervention in its affairs. Within this city Calvin could set to work unhampered by too much outside interference; from it he could keep in touch with the rest of Europe :

> He was probably better informed about the religious and political affairs of his time than anyone else in Switzerland.[21]

At this centre men were trained and sent out into the lands of Europe. Most of the factual information about them, and

especially about those trained for the work in France, comes to us from records which are available for only part of the period between 1541 and 1564. R. M. Kingdon, whose work with these records has opened up this whole field of investigation within the last thirty years or so, says :

> In April 1555 the official Registers of the Company (of Pastors) for the first time listed missionaries formally dispatched.[22]

Obviously, records prior to this time were not retained for reasons of security. On this question of extant records P. E. Hughes reminds us :

> They were restricted, in the main, to the few years between 1555 and 1562 when it was felt that the names of those who were sent out from Geneva as missionaries might be recorded (though not advertised) with some degree of safety.[23]

We know that a very solid programme of education was laid out for these men. One of the catalysts of Reformation had been scholarly study of the Scriptures and so every man training for this ministry was expected to be well equipped for the life-long task of biblical exegesis and exposition. The maestro himself epitomised the ideal as in his daily lectures and expositions he spoke extemporaneously and directly from the Hebrew or Greek text of the Scriptures.

> People today turn up their noses at the many sermons in Geneva and the "intellectualist" instruction. But we should realise that on this intellectualism depends a great deal of the penetrating power of Calvinism. The Calvinist knows *what* he believes and *why* he believes it.[24]

The source of Protestant power in France, shown by the sudden appearance of organised Huguenot armies in 1560, has always been difficult for historians to explain. The entire movement is expressive of careful organisation and meticulous central planning. It now emerges that a well-instructed people had by then been integrated into a structured church life which, like a spider's web, reached out into all the provinces and yet had sufficient central coherence for problems to be discussed, plans to be formulated and, if necessary, unified defensive strategies employed.

There is now, also, a growing awareness that the emergence of this powerfully motivated church has to be traced back to the

training at Geneva of a very effective missionary force. And supporting it was the line of direct communication back into Geneva, and the men there who had moulded its beliefs and directed its energies. The missionary thrust inherent in their theology, and the spiritual vision for the salvation of others which it generated, ensured that Calvin – and his ministerial colleagues in Geneva – recognised, in the mountain pathways into France, doors of opportunity for spreading the gospel. The story of how they went through them is, in the words of Professor David B. Calhoun, "a thrilling chapter in the history of missions".[25]

Much more could be said on this fascinating subject, but even our brief, outline study illustrates the urgent need to reassess and reinterpret the traditional notions entertained about it. The more recent collations, and interpretations, of the relevant data available to us about Calvin, Geneva and Mission combine to show that he was the person, and it the place, to which one of the finest churches of the Reformation era owed, under God, its life and witness. It was a church which was to stand strong for Christ for more than one hundred years in its own homeland and which, even after its final dispersal in the latter part of the seventeenth century, took its godly witness and its theological heritage out from France to England, Ireland, Holland, America and South Africa.

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1. Theodore de Beze, *Vie de Calvin*, in *Calvini Opera*, XXI, 45. cf. also, *The History and Character of Calvinism*, (Oxford, 1953; Galaxy Paper, 1967), by John T. McNeill, p. 227.
2. P. E. Hughes, "John Calvin : Director of Missions", in *The Heritage of John Calvin*, J. Bratt, ed. (Grand Rapids 1973); p. 42.
3. *Presbuterion* : Volume V, No. 1, Spring 1979, p. 16.
4. Calvin holds that the gospel call embraces all men, but is made effectual only to the elect. He writes : Did God not, at the very time when he is verbally exhorting all to repentance, influence the elect by the secret movement of his Spirit, Jeremiah would not say, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned I repented." . . . let us now see whether there be any inconsistency between the two things – viz. that God, by an eternal decree, fixed the number of those whom he is pleased to embrace in love, and on whom he is pleased to display his wrath, and that he offers salvation indiscriminately to all. I hold that they

are perfectly consistent, for all that is meant by the promise is, just that his mercy is offered to all who desire and implore it, and this none do, save those whom he has enlightened. *Institutes*, III : 24 : 16 and 17; E. T. of H. Beveridge, Vol. 2, p. 256. (London 1957), cf also his following discussion re the will of God and his assertion : though to our apprehension the will of God is manifold, yet he does not in himself will opposites.

5. *Op. cit.* Vol. 2, pp. 221-22. Calvin writes : Some object that God would be inconsistent with himself, in inviting all without distinction while he elects only a few. Thus, according to them, the universality of the promise destroys the distinction of special grace . . . The mode in which Scripture reconciles the two things – viz. that by preaching all are called to faith and repentance, and that yet the Spirit of faith and repentance is not given to all – I have already explained . . . How then can it be said, that God calls while he knows that the called will not come? Let Augustine answer for me : "Would you dispute with me? Wonder with me and exclaim, O the depth! Let us let us both agree in dread, lest we perish in error".
6. He draws special attention to, and quotes with approval, Augustine's telling comment : "Because we know not who belongs to the number of the predestinated, or does not belong, our desire ought to be that all may be saved; and hence every person we meet, we will desire to be with us a partaker of peace." *Op. cit.* Vol. 2, p. 238.
7. Calvin writes : In regard to the elect, we regard calling as the evidence of election. *Op. cit.* III : 21 : 7. Vol. 2 p. 211. The same inter-connection between election and calling is in view, also, when he writes : "Then, if we doubt whether we are received into the protection of Christ, he obviates the doubt when he spontaneously offers himself as our shepherd, and declares that we are of the number of his sheep if we hear his voice (John X : 3, 16). Let us, therefore, embrace Christ, who is kindly offered to us, and comes forth to meet us : he will number us among his flock, and keep us within his fold." p. 245.
8. ". . . where an opportunity presents itself of edifying, let us consider that by the hand of God a door is opened to us for introducing Christ there, and let us not withhold compliance with so kind an indication from God." John Calvin, *Commentary on II Corinthians*, E. T. by J. Pringle, (Edinburgh 1849), ch. 2 : 12; cf. also, his comments on I Cor. 16 : 9.
9. *Commentary on John.* E. T. Wm. Pringle. The Calvin Translation Society. (Edinburgh. 1847).
10. ibid. 11.
11. ibid.
12. *Commentary on Romans;* 10 : 15; E. T. Ed. H. Beveridge; (Edinburgh. 1844).
13. See Calvin's sermon on Deuteronomy 33 : 18, 19.
14. ibid. Rom. 8 : 21.
15. W. Stanford Reid, *The Reformed Theological Review*, Vol. 42; No. 3; 1983, p. 65.

16. Commentary on Isaiah 2 : 3.
17. Op. cit., p. 66.
18. *Ibid.* p. 67.
19. Op. cit., p. 44.
20. Bonnet. *Letters of John Calvin*, p. 227.
21. Harro Hopfel, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, (London 1982), Paperback ed. 1985, p. 140.
22. R. M. Kingdon, *Geneva, and the Coming of the Wars of Religion to France 1555-63*, (Geneva 1953), p. 2.
23. Op, cit. p. 45.
24. Karl Hall, quoted by T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin*, p. 113.
25. Op. cit., p. 27.

PREACHING FROM THE HEBREW BIBLE

by Hugh J. Blair

For over thirty years Hugh J. Blair was Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament in the Reformed Theological College, Belfast.

There are certain difficulties in the writing of this article – and at least one in the reading of it – which perhaps justify a rather more personal introduction than is customary.

One difficulty arises from the wealth of material which is available. In thirty years of teaching Old Testament in the Reformed Theological College it was my practice to give a lecture each week on 'Preaching from the Hebrew Bible.' The aim was to relate the academic work of the students in their study of Hebrew to what would be their primary task, the preaching of the Word of God, and, hopefully, to convince them that the toil of learning Hebrew was worthwhile. It would be impossible to make any kind of a digest of the accumulation of thirty years' material, and a selection would demand some kind of grouping that would help to avoid the comment of a man who was given the gift of an encyclopaedia, and who on being asked his opinion of it replied, "It's very interesting, but a bit disconnected." That difficulty has been avoided by taking one passage in which there is a wealth of riches in the original Hebrew, using that as a framework, and claiming the right to digress to other passages suggested by it.

A second difficulty is that the title of the article is enough to put a large majority of readers off, so that they pass by on the other side to a place where they will feel more at home. It would have been tempting to have given the title as "Preaching from the Old Testament," to lure the unsuspecting reader to begin reading, only to find that what was in view was the Old Testament as originally given, that is, in Hebrew, and that what was intended was to show how there is a wealth of significance in the original that no translation, however accurate, can wholly capture. For the encouragement of those who know no Hebrew or whose

Hebrew has vanished into the limbo of forgotten things, let me say that Hebrew words will be kept to a minimum, and that for the Hebrew-less Young's Analytical Concordance can help to give the significance of Hebrew vocabulary.

One difficulty in the reading of the article is that the few Hebrew words written have to be transliterated into English letters. That can give no more than an approximate pronunciation, though it helps the Hebrew-less to read the word that is under consideration, however peculiar it may look. The Hebrew scholar may find it frustrating, for he has to turn the letters back into Hebrew characters to recognise the word. We must always consider the weaker brother!

Let me end this personal introduction by saying that in my experience the Biblical principle has been abundantly fulfilled : "The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops" (II Timothy 2 : 6, NIV). I thank God for all that He has said to me through my study of the Hebrew Bible.

Lamentations 3 : 21–27 – Hope for a dark day

The Book of Lamentations may seem a strange place to look for an illustration of the value of the Hebrew Bible in preaching, and a strange place to look for hope in a dark day. Yet both are found in Lamentations 3 : 21–27 :

> This I recall to my mind,
> Therefore I have hope.
> The Lord's loving kindnesses indeed never cease,
> For His compassions never fail.
> They are new every morning;
> Great is Thy faithfulness.
> "The Lord is my portion", says my soul,
> "Therefore I have hope in Him."
> The Lord is good to those who wait for Him,
> To the person who seeks Him.
> It is good that he waits silently
> For the salvation of the Lord.
> It is good for a man that he should bear
> The yoke in his youth.
>
> (quoted from NASV)

The theme of the passage is hope for a dark day, set against a background of violence and destruction far worse than anything

we have known, perhaps as bad as anything the world has ever known – the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Much of the book gives in horrifying detail something of what that destruction meant. To take only one example, and with scenes of starving children in drought-stricken countries in our minds, read 2. IIb, 12 in NIV : 'Children and infants faint in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, "Where is bread and wine?" as they faint like wounded men in the streets of the city, as their lives ebb away in their mothers' arms.' The book is full of that kind of anguish. And it is not suffering in general that is in view : it is personal suffering. The word 'I' occurs in verse after verse. The heart knows its own bitterness. Then in the middle of it all this verse : 'This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope.' What does this man fix his mind on that gives him hope? The verses that follow give the answer.

There is an abundance of wealth in the Hebrew of this passage, for many of the great words that are at the heart of the gospel are here. It is difficult to arrange them, but the Book of Lamentations itself gives us a guide to grouping. With the exception of chapter five, the chapters of the book are written in acrostic form, with the verses – 22 in chapters 1, 2, 4 and 66 in chapter 3 – beginning with the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet in turn, with three verses for each letter in chapter 3. Verses 25, 26, 27 of that chapter begin not only with the same letter but with the same word – *tob* – translated 'good' :

> 'Good is the Lord to those who wait for Him' :
> 'Good it is that one should hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord' :
> 'Good it is that a man should bear the yoke in his youth.'

Those three declarations can be taken as a framework for the study of the whole passage.

I. Lamentations 3 : 22, 23 – The Character of God

What God's goodness means for us is spelled out in verses 22, 23, underlining His basic characteristics His unending covenant love, His unfailing compassion, and His immeasurable faithfulness.

(a) God's unending covenant love – "His lovingkindnesses never cease."

It seems best to make a slight textual emendation, suggested by the Targum and the Syriac version, and translate, "The Lord's lovingkindnesses never cease." That makes it parallel to the second half of the verse.

No English translation is adequate for the Hebrew word – *hesed* – used here in the plural, called by T. F. Torrance "the great sacramental word of the Old Testament Faith"[1]. It has been variously translated 'mercy', 'love', 'lovingkindness', 'stedfast love', 'covenant love', 'leal-love' (by a Scotsman, George Adam Smith), and, perhaps best of all, as in the metrical version of Psalm 36 : 7 (English numbering), 'grace' ("How precious is Thy grace"). Better than any attempt to find an English equivalent is to see the characteristic in action, as in the Book of Hosea. The word occurs again and again in that book, and is seen in action in Hosea's going after his unfaithful wife, buying her back and bringing her home. That, Hosea realised, was what God was prepared to do for erring Israel, and so from the depths of his own experience he brings God's message to His people : "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever : I will betroth thee unto Me . : . in lovingkindness" (Hosea 2 : 19). That is God's unending love, God's infinite grace.

God's goodness and His mercy – His covenant love – are linked together again in the last verse of Psalm 23 : they "follow me" – or, more vividly, "pursue me" – "all the days of my life." Indeed the Hebrew of this best-loved Psalm gives insights into its message that our familiarity with the English words may have hidden from us, and it may be helpful to digress for a little to look at some of them.

Psalm 23 – The good and gracious Shepherd

"I shall not want" is literally "I shall not lack", and the use of the word in other contexts tells us something of the wonder of the Good Shepherd's provision for us. For example, God's provision for our pilgrimage is seen in the fact that the Israelites who gathered the manna, whether they gathered much or little, had no lack (Exodus 16 : 18). The Good Shepherd's provision for our poverty is seen in the fact that in the midst of famine in

I Kings 17, the widow's cruse of oil did not fail, literally, was not lacking. God's provision for our partaking is seen in Psalm 34 – a Psalm written according to the title when David was in desperate peril – where the word occurs repeatedly. "O fear the Lord, ye his saints : for there is no lack to them that fear Him. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger : but they that seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing." "O taste and see that the Lord is good."

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters." There is the answer to life's stress and strain. "He causes me to lie down." Sometimes He has to do it quite literally, when a man who has been driving himself for years is laid on a bed of sickness. "Pastures of tender grass" tell us of the abundance of the resources that are available for us. "Still waters" are literally "waters of quietness", meaning two things : "quiet waters", indicating the times and places of quietness that the Lord gives us to refresh our souls; and "waters that bring quietness", giving us relaxation from all the tensions and strains of life. Rest, resources, refreshment and relaxation are all available to us from the Good Shepherd.

"He restoreth my soul" is literally "He brings my soul, or my life, back". Different senses in which the word is used elsewhere help us to understand what is meant by the restoration of the soul. In Psalm 19 : 7 it is translated, "The law of the Lord is perfect, *converting* the soul." That is the basic turning back that is needed. The Lord must do it for us, as comes out very clearly in the refrain of another Shepherd Psalm, Psalm 80 : "Turn us again" – and the form of the Hebrew verb means "Cause us to turn" – "and we shall be saved." "He brings my soul back" – there is a message there for the backslider, brought back to the fold from his wandering to the feeding of the Good Shepherd. See Jeremiah 50 : 17, 19 : "Israel is a scattered sheep . . . I will bring Israel again to his habitation, and he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan, and his soul shall be satisfied upon mount Ephraim and Gilead." Another translation is "He refreshes my soul", as with food and drink, earnestly longed for in Lamentations 1 : 11, 16, 19. There is an interesting use of the word in Proverbs 25 : 13 : "As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him, for he restoreth the soul." There are those in our congregations who are needing the restoration and the refreshment

that a faithful messenger can bring, God's restoration and refreshment.

Translators take the phrase "the valley of the shadow of death" in two ways, depending on whether they underline 'shadow' or 'death.' We are accustomed to thinking of it as the dark valley of death through which all must pass. But it is possible also to think of the phrase as referring to the shadows, deep as death, death-like shadows, through which many have to pass. We can apply it to the sombre valley of depression, and we can apply it to the valley of death[2]. For both, the two words 'walk' and 'through'[3] have their own comfort. In the case of the shadowed valley of depression, it may seem endless, but we are only asked to walk through it one step at a time; and there is an exit from it, we can go through into the sunshine again. For the valley of death the same thing is true : there is a journey to be made, and there is a destination to be reached at the other end. And through it all there is a sure presence. "Thou" – not "He" any longer – "art with me." Before you come to the dark valley you may talk about the Good Shepherd : in the dark valley you talk to Him.

Verse 5 tells of the Good Shepherd's provision. Its setting is "in the presence of mine enemies." That means two things. It means that the enemies are there, and that they will do all they can to prevent the provision reaching the flock. But it also means that the Good Shepherd will make all the efforts of the enemy ineffective. He spreads a table for His people "in front of" their enemies[4] and they can only watch in chagrin and dismay as the provision is given and received. "Preparest" tells us of the arranging of the provision. The word means literally 'to arrange' or 'to set in order'. That suggests three things. The first is security. The enemies may be marshalled (the word often has a military significance); so is the provision! The second thing involved in the Good Shepherd's arranging of the provision is sacrifice. The Hebrew word is found in another very significant setting – in Genesis 22 : 9 in the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. "Abraham set the wood in order." That gives us an inkling of the cost of the provision that God makes for us : behind all His gifts is the gift of His Son. The third thing in the Good Shepherd's arranging of the provision is sureness. In II Samuel 23 : 5 we find David rejoicing in the sureness of the covenant that God had graciously made with him : "Yet He hath made with me

an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things" – arranged, prepared in all things – "and sure."

It is all summed up in the last verse of the Psalm. The first word of the verse in Hebrew can be translated 'Surely' or 'Only', and we must take it in both senses. A poignant illustration comes from the history of the Scottish Covenanters. After the battle of Ayrsmoss, where Richard Cameron was killed, his head and hands were cut off, to be taken to Edinburgh and affixed to the Netherbow. Those who carried them stopped at the Tolbooth where his father, Alan Cameron, lay in prison. Callously the soldiers uncovered what they bore and asked the old man, "Do you know them?" "I know them", he said, "I know them. They are my son's, my dear son's. It is the Lord. Good is the will of the Lord Who cannot wrong me, nor mine, but has made goodness and mercy to follow us all our days." "Only goodness and mercy . . . " The Lord's goodness and grace – His goodness manifested in His grace – lie behind all His shepherding. His grace never ceases. That brings us back to Lamentations 3, and a second manifestation of His goodness.

(b) God's unfailing compassion – "His compassions fail not."

The word translated 'compassions' is applied to the tender pity that a mother feels for the child of her womb – the word is linked with the word for 'womb'. In the first verse of Psalm 51, the A.V. translates it 'tender mercies'. The cognate verb is found in Psalm 103 : 13 to express the pity that a father has for his children, the same pity that the Lord has for His children. The picture for us is the picture of God the Father looking down in pity on His suffering people, the picture of Christ the Son looking out on a multitude of needy folk and being moved with compassion for them. The Lord's compassions do not fail.

The goodness of God is further shown in –

(c) His immeasurable faithfulness – "Great is Thy faithfulness"

Note the change from 'His' to 'Thy', the same change as we have seen in Psalm 23. It almost seems as if the Lord's faithfulness brings Him nearer to His needy children, and means more to His needy children, than even His love or His compassion. 'Thy

faithfulness' speaks of a closer intimacy than 'His love' or 'His compassions'. Certainly God's faithfulness is what we hang on to in life's dark hours. A. J. Gossip has a sermon on the faithfulness of God, and he gave it the title, "The Last Line of Defence"[5]. That is what we hold on to in the last resort.

The word translated 'great' is a bigger word than that : it means vast in size. God's faithfulness is immeasurable.

The word translated 'faithfulness' is linked with a Hebrew word – found in the same form in many languages – which everyone knows and uses, the word, 'Amen'. It comes from a basic stem meaning 'to confirm, support.' An interesting use of it is found in Exodus 17 : 12 where we are told that "Moses' hands were steady." There is a steadiness, a stability, in God's faithfulness which means that we can rely on Him utterly. A phrase in Isaiah 65 : 16 can be translated literally, "The God of the Amen." That can be linked with Paul's triumphant declaration in II Corinthians 1 : 20 about the fulfilment of God's promises in Christ : "All the promises of God in Him are 'Yes' and in Him 'Amen'." And that 'Amen' rings out again and again in Christ's proclamation of the truths of God, "Amen, Amen, I say unto you." He Himself is recognised in heaven as "The Amen, the faithful and true witness" (Revelation 3 : 14). Christ is the faithfulness of God incarnate. "Great is Thy faithfulness."

Before we pass on from the character of God set forth in Lamentations 3 : 22, 23 to the response that that elicits from man, it is good for the preacher who proclaims God's grace, God's compassion, and God's faithfulness to be reminded that these are what he needs himself. We find that reminder in Psalm 40 : 9–11.

Psalm 40 : 9–11 – The Gospel for the Preacher

I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly;
I do not seal my lips, as you know, O Lord.
I do not hide your righteousness in my heart;
I speak of your faithfulness and salvation.
I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly.

The good news that the preacher proclaims is the message of God's righteousness, God's faithfulness, God's salvation, God's

grace and God's truth. Suddenly he realises that these are exactly the things that he needs for himself. A story of Holman Hunt's famous picture 'The Light of the World' – showing Christ standing outside a doorway – illustrates the Psalmist's reaction. Once when the frame was taken off the original, to do some repairs, there was found written on the corner in Latin, "Do not pass me by, O Lord." The artist had made personal application of the truth which he had portrayed. That was the Psalmist's reaction, for he goes on –

> You, O Lord, do not withhold your compassions from me;
> Let your love and your truth continually guard me.

The good news that the preacher brought to others was the good news that he needed for himself. The last verse of the Psalm shows that he realises his need of the gospel for himself –

> I am poor and needy (the word is stronger than 'needy' – 'destitute')
> Let the Lord think on me.
> You are my help and my deliverer;
> O my God, do not delay.

Every time a preacher goes up the steps of the pulpit he must realise that he is as poor and needy as any of those to whom he speaks, and that he needs urgently and immediately the good news of the grace of God that he brings to others, and the help and deliverance that only God can give.

Going back to Lamentations 3, how do we apply the wonderful picture of the character of God to our need? The answer is in verse 24, which is linked to vv. 22, 23, beginning with the same Hebrew letter –

> The Lord is my portion, saith my soul;
> Therefore will I hope in Him.

The word translated 'portion' is the word used in the account of the allocation of the parts of the Promised Land to the tribes of Israel. The Levites were not given any allocation; the Lord would be their portion. That is what the writer of Lamentations claims: "The Lord is my portion : all that the Lord has promised is mine therefore I will hope in Him."

Lamentations 3 : 24–26 – The Confidence of Man

The Confidence of man – "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God."

All the verbs used in vv. 24–26 speak of trusting the Lord, waiting on Him with confidence, hoping in Him.

J. G. S. S. Thomson in his book *The Praying Christ* has pointed out that no fewer than eight Hebrew words are translated 'wait' in the phrase 'Wait on the Lord'.[6] Three of them are found in this passage.

(a) One – *qavah* – in v. 25 has the sense of waiting with strain and tension. Basically it meant 'to twist or stretch', and later it came to mean 'to be under tension.' We are reminded that waiting on the Lord is not a passive, effortless thing; it involves strain and effort, the strain and effort, as we are reminded in Psalm 130, verses 5 and 6, of the watchman whose eyes strain out into the darkness, waiting for the dawn. Waiting on the Lord involves tension like that, the tension that is seen in earnest seeking, v. 25, "The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him."

(b) Another word – *yahal* – found in verses 21, 24 and 26, means 'to hope', 'to wait expectantly.' There is an interesting use of this word in the account of the cessation of the Flood in Genesis 8 : 6ff. In v. 10 we are told that Noah 'waited seven more days' before sending out the dove for a second time. When the dove returned with a freshly plucked olive leaf in its beak, we are told in v. 12 Noah 'waited seven more days.' No translation brings out the fact that two different words for 'wait' are used – *hul* in v. 10 and *yahal* in v. 12. Indeed the textual critics simply make a conjectural emendation to make them both the same. But they are not the same! The word in v. 10 – like *qavah* – means to wait in tension (its basic meaning is 'to twist or writhe'), in suspense and anxiety. The word in verse 12 – *yahal* – means 'to wait in trusting expectancy'. God used the olive leaf to bring Noah from one kind of waiting to the other, something He does for us so often, when He gives us helps and encouragements for our faith, something Christ did so often in the New Testament miracles.

How do we move from one kind of waiting to the other? The two words – *qavah*, meaning tense waiting; and *yahal*, meaning

expectant waiting – are found in Psalm 130, verse 5. The first word, of tense waiting, is found at the beginning of the verse, and is understood in v. 6. The second word, of expectant waiting, is found at the end of the verse : "I hope *in His word.*" It is God's word, sure and certain, that enables us to move from tense waiting to expectant waiting, for He is faithful Who has promised.

(c) The third word – *dumam* – translated 'quietly wait' in v. 26, has the same note of quiet confidence. That confidence, tense and at the same time expectant and quiet, means trusting the utter trustworthiness of the Lord : it means trusting Him with a hope that is supremely confident, for no one who trusted Him has ever been put to shame : it means seeking Him with eager seeking, for there is no hope for us anywhere else : it means a quiet waiting that is prepared to trust Him in spite of everything that may challenge our trust. "Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him" (Job 13 : 15).

What we are seeking and what we are trusting Him for is "the salvation of the Lord." The word translated 'salvation' has its own special significance. It means being brought from a narrow, restricted existence into a broad and spacious place. It is good that a man should seek and hope and quietly wait for that salvation.

There is another response that must be made to the Lord's unending covenant love, His unfailing compassion, and His immeasurable faithfulness –

III. Lamentations 3 : 27 – The Commitment of Man

"It is good for a man that he bear (take up) the yoke in his youth." In Jeremiah 27 : 12 the prophet brings his message to King Zedekiah, "Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people and live." To take up the yoke means submission and commitment.

The verb used here – *nasa'* – means 'to take up' or 'to bear.' Girdlestone in his *Synonyms of the Old Testament* puts the development in the meaning of the word very simply : "It implies first the *lifting-up*; secondly, the *carrying*; and thirdly, the *taking away* of a burden."[7] There is something to be said for taking the first meaning here : "It is good for a man to take up the yoke in his youth." It is significant that Grimm-Thayer's Lexicon under

'airo', the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *'nasa"* gives Lamentations 3 : 27 as an Old Testament parallel to Matthew 11 : 27, "Take My yoke upon you . . . " What is in view is a willing submission and commitment. Salvation means more than being delivered; it means a willing acceptance of what the Lord lays upon us. Christ not only said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest." He went on, "Take My yoke upon you." There must be not only trust but also submission and commitment.

It is significant that the word translated 'man' in Lamentations 3 : 27 means 'man in his strength, in his self-sufficiency.' Such a man has got to submit to the yoke, to take it willingly. Sometimes it will take the kind of discipline that is the background to Lamentations to bring a man to the place where he is willing to offer his neck to the yoke and to submit meekly. When should this happen? "It is good for a man to take the yoke *in his youth*", early in life, before the neck becomes hardened and the heart unresponsive. Then is the time for submission and commitment.

The normal Hebrew word for 'commit' is *paqad*, found most memorably in Psalm 31 : 5 : "Into Thine hand I commit my spirit."

Psalm 31 : 5 – Commitment and Confidence

"Into Thine hand I commit my spirit." That verse stands out for us because it was with these words that Christ yielded up His spirit on the Cross. Not only was it to the Psalms that He turned in the moment of dying; it was to a prayer that no doubt He had learned to pray from His boyhood days, a prayer that every pious Jewish mother taught her children to say last thing at night. It is a word for living as well as a word for dying.

What does commitment mean? The word as used in different settings in different places in the Old Testament will help us to understand.

(a) Commitment means a life that is handed over for safe keeping.

In I Kings 14 : 27 we are told that Rehoboam made bronze shields and committed them to the care of the commanders of the guard on duty at the entrance of the royal palace. Commitment meant handing over for safe keeping.

David in this Psalm was very much aware of his need for safe keeping. Many of the verses show us a man surrounded by threatening enemies. What could he do? He committed himself to the Lord. He puts it very simply in 6b and 14, where he uses exactly the same words : "I" – and the word is emphatic – "trust in the Lord." It is noteworthy that the A.V. translates in one verse, "I trust", and in the other "I trusted." Both are accurate translations of the same Hebrew perfect which can mean a decisive action at a definite moment, or, alternatively, a habitual attitude. It might have been better to take the past tense in v. 6 – "I trusted", referring to David's past experiences of God's deliverance – and the present continuous tense in v. 14 – "I keep trusting", in the midst of a present crisis, "I keep saying, Thou art my God." In any case, faith is a decisive act and a continuous relying; and commitment is a handing over for safe keeping, decisive and continuing.

(b) Commitment means a life that is controlled.

The word translated 'commit' can have the meaning 'to appoint to have charge'. In Genesis 39 : 4 it is the word used to describe how Potiphar made Joseph 'overseer over his house'. He put Joseph in full control. A life committed is a life in which God is given full control.

(c) Commitment means a life that is commanded.

In I Samuel 29 : 4 the word translated 'commit' is used to describe the position assigned to David by Achish, king of the Philistines, when David had put himself under his command. "Let him return," said the suspicious Philistine commanders to Achish, "to the place you assigned him." Commitment means a willingness to be commanded. Paul knew that when he met Christ on the Damascus Road. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" A commitment that is not willing to ask that question, and to accept the answer, is not commitment at all.

Such commitment leads to confidence. In the Hebrew of Psalm 31 verse 5 and verse 15 (English numbering) begin with the same word in an emphatic position : "In Thy hand." "In Thy hand I commit my spirit." "In Thy hand are my times." Of life's multitude of diverse experiences David could say, "My times are in Thy hand," because he had first said, "Into Thy hand I commit my spirit." And the confidence that he had stemmed from this :

"Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." That brings us back to the foundation of everything : the God Who redeems His people is the God of truth, the trustworthy God. "Great is Thy faithfulness." And so, O Lord, I trust in Thee, and I commit myself to Thy sure keeping.

References

1. T. F. Torrance, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 1948, p. 60.
2. Support for "through a death-like valley" is found in the parallels to "darkness" which occur frequently, especially in Job, e.g. 3 : 5; 12 : 22. But note Job 10 : 22 where it is "death" that is in view. It is possible to take both senses in Psalm 23.
3. The preposition means 'in' but, particularly after verbs of motion, can mean 'through', e.g. Genesis 12 : 6; 13 : 17; II Samuel 24 : 2.
4. Brown, Driver and Briggs take the word *neged* here as meaning "to the mortification of", Hebrew and English Lexicon, p. 617a.
5. A. J. Gossip, *The Hero in Thy Soul*, p. 237.
6. Printed as a separate article in *The Expository Times*, Vol. LXV, No. 7, 196ff.
7. Op. cit., p. 137.

DOES GOD SUFFER?

by Frederick S. Leahy

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The notion of a suffering God has come to the fore in recent times largely because of the influence of Barth and Moltmann. For some the idea has brought comfort in time of great sorrow. This is true, for example, for Professor Nicholas Wolterstorff whose young son lost his life while mountain-climbing in Austria. A most promising life was suddenly cut off so far as this world was concerned. Wolterstorff's personal jottings at the time were later published under the title, *Lament for a Son.* Like Job, the author wrestles with the problem of suffering. He is totally honest and there are no cheap answers. He finds relief in the idea that God not only suffered, but suffers *now.*

> God is not only the God of the sufferers, but the God Who suffers. The pain and fallenness of humanity have entered into his heart. Through the prism of my tears I have seen a suffering God.[1]
>
> * * * * *
>
> We're in it together, God and we, together in the history of our world. The history of our world is the history of our suffering together. Every act of evil extracts a tear from God, every plunge into anguish a sob from God. But also the history of our world is the history of our deliverance together. God's work to release himself from his suffering is his work to deliver the world from its agony; our struggle for joy and justice is our struggle to relieve God's sorrow. When God's cup of suffering is full, our world's redemption is fulfilled. Until justice and peace embrace, God's dance of joy is delayed.[2]
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> * * * * *
>
> God is appalled by death. My pain over my son's death is shared by *his* pain over my son's death. And, yes, I share in his pain over *his* son's death.[3]

So the questions are there. *Can* God suffer? *Did* God suffer? *Does* God suffer?

The Problem to be Considered

The problem lies in the fact that there is sharp conflict between statements of Christian theologians in this area. We recall the ancient heresy of *Patripassianism,* the idea that the Father suffered as the Son, and the closely allied *Theopaschitism,* the belief that in the passion of Christ 'God had suffered and been crucified.' These twin heresies sprang from a defective doctrine of the Trinity, a *modal* doctrine which held that there was only one 'Person' and that the names Father, Son and Spirit simply describe certain roles which God successively assumes. Consequently and inevitably it follows that it was God Who suffered on the Cross.

Patripassianism, in whatever form, was consistently rejected by orthodoxy and this is reflected in the historic Reformed Confessions and in the writings of most Reformed theologians. God is described in the Westminster Confession as "a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts or passions . . ." (II. 1). Zacharias Ursinus, one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, in his commentary on that catechism states :

> Christ suffered, not according to both natures, nor according to the Divinity, but according to the human nature only, both in body and soul; for the divine nature is immutable, impassible, and life itself, and so cannot die.[4]

The Second Helvetic Confession, 1566, composed by Heinrich Bullinger, and widely received, states :

> The Divine Nature of Christ is not Passible (not capable of suffering) . . . Therefore, we do not in any way teach that the divine nature in Christ has suffered . . .[5]

Dr. William Symington, in his classic work on the Atonement, 1834, says of Christ :

> The possession of a human nature qualified him for suffering; the divinity of his person gave to his suffering a worth equivalent to its dignity. Although the human nature was alone capable of suffering, it was nevertheless the person to whom the nature belonged who suffered. It may be thought that at this rate, as the person was divine, such an assertion involves the blasphemy that Deity suffered. By no means.[6]

Symington then proceeds to show that when a person suffers it does not follow that he suffers in all that pertains to him; e.g., he

may suffer in his property but not in his honour; in his happiness but not in his character, and so on. It is significant that Symington is at pains to reject the notion that the Deity suffered; this he terms 'blasphemy.'

Dr. Charles Hodge, in his *Systematic Theology*, states that the idea that "the divine nature itself suffered" is "repudiated alike by the Latin, Lutheran and Reformed churches."[7] Quotations in similar vein could be given from distinguished theologians like Shedd, Dabney, Heppe and also from the Reformers. The Divine nature, they say, cannot, did not and does not suffer. Nothing can disturb or disrupt the peace, harmony and tranquillity that exist within the Godhead. God is never miserable.

Not all agree. Dr. A. H. Strong writes :

> The love of God involves the possibility of divine suffering . . . God is passible or capable of suffering.[8]

Strong quotes Josiah Royce with approval :

> When you suffer, your sufferings are God's sufferings – not his external work nor his external penalty, nor the fruit of his neglect, but identically his own personal woe. In you God himself suffers, precisely as you do, and has all your reasons for overcoming this grief.[9]

The theologian today chiefly responsible for the current upsurge of neo-Patripassianism is Jurgen Moltmann, Professor of Systematic Theology at Tubingen. The second volume of his famous trilogy is entitled, *The Crucified God*. Moltmann does not mince his words. The godforsakenness of the world "is suffered by God himself on the cross."[10] God, he maintains, being essentially love is essentially suffering and so it is in and by the Cross that God defines Himself. Richard Bauckham sums up Moltmann's position :

> It is not only Jesus, the Son of God, who suffers. While the Son suffers abandonment by the Father in his dying, the Father suffers in grief the death of the Son. The divine suffering in solidarity with the world involves both the Father's grief in surrendering the Son to death and the Son's agony in surrendering himself on the cross.[11]

Over and over Moltmann hammers out his theme.

> Divine suffering is . . . no mere *opus ad extra;* it takes place within the inner trinitarian life of God.[12]

* * * * *

> A God who cannot suffer is poorer than any man. For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is also a loveless being.[13]

In Christ's dread cry of dereliction on the Cross, Moltmann sees the Fatherlessness of the Son matched by the Sonlessness of the Father. But he rejects labels like 'Patripassianism' and 'Theopaschitism' in favour of what he terms 'Patricompassionism.'[14]

In an article entitled "Impassibility, Asceticism and the Vision of God," by Denis Sutherland, in a recent issue of *The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology,* Moltmann's general approach is followed. Sutherland describes the pastoral consequences of holding to the concept of the impassibility of God as 'disastrous'. "We could say," he writes, "that an apathetic God has apathetic and fatalistic offspring."[15] John Stott, in *The Cross of Christ,* quotes Moltmann with approval :

> Were God incapable of suffering . . . then he would also be incapable of love.[16]

He quotes Bonhoeffer who wrote from prison, "Only the suffering God can help."[17]

Professor Donald MacLeod affirms that

> God understands our pain : not only from a distance, but from the inside . . . The Father suffers in the Son, because of the *perichoresis* (the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father). And the Father suffers because He loves the Son and suffers a loss corresponding to the Son's own loss when the communion between them is disrupted.[18]

To the question of the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son (Jn. 14 : 10; 17 : 21) we shall return. Those who, like Moltmann, insist on a suffering God (some would limit the suffering to the Cross), tend to reject the traditional view of God as being quite unscriptural. They see it as Greek and Aristotelian

rather than Jewish and Christian. They quote in support of their position passages like Isaiah 63 : 9, "In all their affliction he was afflicted . . ." There is, therefore, a wide gulf between the upholders of this view and those who see it at worst as blasphemy and at best as a serious aberration.

The Extremes to be Avoided

There is the extreme of regarding God as remote, feelingless and unmoved by what happens to this world. We certainly must not accept a Greek concept of deity. However, it is precisely at this point that a great deal of misunderstanding and confusion have arisen. What did the Westminster Divines have in mind when they described God as "a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts or passions"? They certainly did not mean that God had no feelings or emotions. The word 'passion' is derived from a Latin word, patior, meaning to suffer. In this sense we speak of the passion of Christ. Such suffering is the result of action *from without.* In this strict sense of the term, God has no passions. He cannot be moved or wrought upon by anything outside Himself, unlike all His creatures. He is self-subsistent and independent of His creation. All God's actions and attitudes are self-determined. His love and His wrath, for example, are very real, but they are self-moved.

This vital point has been missed by critics of the wording of our Confession on this subject. It is wrongly assumed that the Confession, at this point, presents an Aristotelian view of God, a mere 'uncaused cause,' the 'unmoved mover.' Spinoza presented such a concept when he wrote

> God is free from all passions . . . He is not affected with joy and sadness; or with love and hatred.[19]

But an emotionless God would be mere intelligence, and, to quote Dr. W. G. T. Shedd, "the lowest form of intelligence." Says Shedd

> A theory that begins with affirming absolute indifference in God, and denying that he either loves the good, or hates the evil, must end ultimately in rejecting all moral attributes, and reducing him to blind force.[20]

The Scriptures repeatedly attribute feeling to God. Some of these ascriptions are to be taken literally, like love and wrath

others metaphorically, like fear (Gen. 3 : 22, 23), jealousy and repenting. Shedd lays down the criterion of the divine blessedness when it comes to distinguishing between feelings which are to be regarded literally and those which are to be considered metaphorical.

> God cannot be the subject of any emotion that is intrinsically and necessarily an unhappy one. If he literally feared his foes, or were literally jealous of a rival, he would so far forth be miserable.[21]

What, then, of God's wrath? It is the reverse side of His love of righteousness. God's love and wrath are inseparable. It is impossible to love the good without hating the evil. Both emotions are entirely compatible with the Divine blessedness.

> When God hates what is hateful, and is angry at that which merits wrath, the true nature and fitness of things is observed, and he feels in himself that inward satisfaction which is the substance of happiness.[22]

In recognizing that God has the feelings of personality as embraced by His love and His wrath, we avoid the concept of a cold, unconcerned deity on the one hand and that of a tortured, suffering deity on the other. Resurgent neo-patripassianism presents us with a God Who *can* suffer, who *has* suffered and Who (in the thinking of Moltmann and others) *still* suffers. We noted the appeal to Isaiah 63 : 9. Matthew Henry's comment is helpful here.

> . . . not that the Eternal Mind is capable of grieving or God's infinite blessedness of suffering the least damage or diminution . . . He takes what injury is done to them as done to Himself and will reckon for it accordingly.[23]

Calvin strikes a similar note.

> In order to move us more powerfully and draw us to himself, the Lord accommodates himself to the manner of men . . . In this sense the Prophet testifies that God, in order to alleviate the distresses and afflictions of his people, himself bore their burdens; *not that he can in any way endure anguish*, but, by a very customary figure of speech, he assumes and applies to himself human passions.[24]

In other words, God *regards* the sufferings of His people as His own sufferings. He is the God Who says, "I know their sorrows"

(Ex. 3 : 7). This is no apathetic God, and equally this is no tortured, anxious God. This is a caring, compassionate God.

The Perspective to be Maintained

The crucial perspective to be maintained in this connection is that of the Person of Christ, the perspective of the incarnation. In Hebrews 2 : 14 we read, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." There we are shown the *purpose* of the incarnation : it was specifically that the Messiah might die. Dr. Philip E. Hughes comments here

> Only the assumption of ***human*** nature could qualify him to fulfil his function of Redeemer, for his human nature fitted him to suffer and die as Man for men, that is vicariously to bear man's punishment and die man's death on the cross.[25]

This vitally important point is too often overlooked when the incarnation is discussed and many commentators miss it. The commentator on Hebrews in *Matthew Henry's Commentary* was one, William Tong, who wrote of Christ

> He became man that he might die; as God he could not die; and therefore he assumed another nature and state.[26]

The Apostle Peter declared, "Christ hath suffered for us *in the flesh* . . ." (I Pet. 4 : 1). Here Alexander Nisbet comments

> Christ our Mediator has taken true flesh upon Him ***and in it has suffered*** all that wrath which was due to the elect for their sins . . . (italics ours).[27]

Reflection upon these and similar passages should convince us that the redemptive suffering took place in the human nature of Christ. Our *Shorter Catechism* tells us that

> The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever.[28]

The humanity of Christ began to exist in the womb of the Virgin. His Person existed from all eternity. Only His divinity is personal. He took human nature to Himself and became the Theanthropos.

the God-man; but He was not two persons. He was *one* Person and that Person was *divine*. Dr. A. A. Hodge writes

> Christ is Mediator, and discharges all the functions of that office, not as Lord, nor as man, but as God-man . . . Because otherwise, being absolute God, it could never have been imposed on him.[29]

It was possible for the eternal Christ to suffer in His human nature because of the hypostatic or personal union of the two natures. Thus what is proper to either nature is attributed to the Person.

Some of the acts of Christ were purely divine, such as forgiveness of sins, and some were purely human, such as eating, drinking and sleeping. Yet all were acts of one and the same Person. Therefore Christ died and rose again. Christ suffered. Christ redeemed us. But He suffered in His human nature. So real is the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ that the Bible speaks of "the blood of God" (Acts 20 : 28), of the One Who died on the Cross as "the Lord of glory" (I Cor. 2 : 8) and of the One Who came down from heaven as "the Son of Man". So the Westminster Confession declares :

> Christ, in the work of mediation, acteth according to both natures; by each nature doing that which is proper to itself; yet by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature.[30]

Here Robert Shaw remarks

> He could only obey and suffer in the human nature, but his obedience and sufferings are predicated of him as the Son of God – as the Lord of glory.[31]

Christ could say "*my* flesh," "*my* blood," and "*my* body."

In the 5th century Nestorius was the centre of controversy because he denied the union of the two natures in the one Person of Christ and seemed to teach that there were two 'persons.' Defending the orthodox position, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Proclus, affirmed, "Mere man could not save : the naked Godhead could not suffer." Dr. George Smeaton states the position thus :

> It must be laid down as an undoubted axiom that Christ, from the very fact of the incarnation, did not in any part of His

> mediatorial work, act as man simply, nor as God simply, but as God-man . . . Thus the sufferings belonged to the Son of God, just as we should say of a person suffering in his hands and feet, that it was borne by the person. The humanity was His, and so was the agony, though the deity could not agonize nor die.[32]

When Professor Robert L. Dabney says that the hypostatic union "is the cornerstone of our redemption," [33] he is stating a profound truth. For it gives worth to the sufferings of our Saviour. Because of the infinite dignity of His Person there is infinite value attached to His work. It will not do to obtrude the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son at this juncture. Undoubtedly each is 'in' the other and the two are one (Jn. 10 : 30); yet they are distinct : there is no loss or confusion of identity. To argue that the Father suffers because of this mutual indwelling, *perichoresis,* is to take a leap that lacks clear Biblical warrant. It is really a leap to absurdity, for as G. C. Berkouwer asks, "How can *God* be forsaken of *God*?" Berkouwer rejects the concept of a suffering God primarily on the grounds of its incompatibility with Scripture. Refuting Barth's thesis that "God Himself" was the subject of substitutionary suffering, Berkouwer states :

> It hardly requires demonstration that in this view of Christ's suffering it becomes difficult to understand that Christ was under the *curse* of the law, that He endured the *wrath* of God, and that He was *forsaken* by God. These are realities which cannot be squared with the suffering of God in which He Himself is *the* subject of the suffering.[34]

Carl Henry adopts a similar stance when he writes

> The premise that Christ who suffered is true God and true man does not require the conclusion that God suffers. The New Testament speaks not of "the obedience of God," as does Barth, but of the Son's obedience to the Father, and of the Son (not the Father) as the "sent" One who responds to the Father's command.[35]

We conclude, then, that Christ suffered for us in His human nature, that the Divine nature cannot suffer and die and that the Divine nature added weight and gave infinite worth to Christ's passion. As Bucanus wrote in the 17th century,

> We ascribe the passion to the human nature, but the efficacy of the passion to the divine, because the Son of God suffered in the assumed and personally united human nature.[36]

Dr. Philip Schaff states the position succinctly :

> The person (of Christ) was the subject, the human nature the seat and the sensorium of the passion.[37]

There is need for caution when we deal with this subject. The One Who died on the Cross was cursed. He experienced damnation. Can we speak of "the crucified God" as Moltmann does? Was Christ's cry of dereliction on the Cross a dialogue or a monologue? While it is true that the Divine nature was incarnate in the Son, it does not follow that the entire Trinity was incarnate. When Christ suffered and died, the Trinity was still complete. Admittedly the Person of Christ is a mystery. So is the Holy Trinity. Yet we confess both doctrines in faith because they are revealed in Scripture. It may be asked if the subject under review warrants so much thought. Is it not somewhat esoteric? In answer it must be stressed that truth is one. No doctrine stands in isolation. Just as one false note can ruin harmony, so one false doctrine damages truth *as a whole.* It is not surprising, then, to discover that Moltmann rejects the doctrine of two distinct natures united in the one Person of Christ, a doctrine finally and firmly established in the Church at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. Moltmann is quite logical and consistent in this as he pursues his concept of a crucified and suffering God.

In rejecting the notion of an apathetic God, and no such notion is to be found in our Reformed Confessions, or in the great Reformed and Lutheran theologians, there is no need to go to the dangerous extreme of positing the idea of a God *in pain.* The doctrine of the incarnation, properly stated, saves us from either extreme and points us to a loving and gracious God. Do not the tears of our Saviour tell us much about God? Of course they do. They were redemptive tears. They were part of Christ's suffering in our room and stead. They belonged to the time of His humiliation. That time has passed. Christ is an exalted Saviour now. The message of His Cross is clear. God does care and God is not inactive. The root-cause of all suffering and death has been dealt with. The enemy of God and of man has been routed. The renewal of the earth is guaranteed. We speak not of a God Who suffered "in Himself" and Who still suffers, but of a God Who was "in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5 : 19), "God in action on our behalf," as Philip E. Hughes puts it.[38]

The message that this lost world so desperately needs to hear is not that of an agonized and agonizing God, but of a sovereign God Who by the Cross of His Son smashed the powers of darkness and evil, dealt with our sin and by His grace brings deliverance to the captives and life to the dead. The agony is over. The victory has been won. For all who rest in Christ's *finished* work there is salvation. In that evangelical context we are to tell men and women of a God Who is "full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth" (Ps. 86 : 15).

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WILLIAM STAVELY : THE APOSTLE OF THE COVENANTERS

by Adam Loughridge

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In the year 1638, when the National Covenant of Scotland was signed, an event, in no way connected with that historic act, took place in the ancient town of Ripon in Yorkshire that was to have far-reaching repercussions on the subsequent history of the Covenanting Church in Ireland.

In that year William Stavely, of Stavely Hall, fell foul of the arrogance of his step-father, a member of the aristocratic family of Lacelles. He was forced to leave home, and in a penniless condition he fled to Ireland where he found a home and an opportunity for work at Kells in County Antrim. Little is known of his marriage or of his immediate family, but in due course the story develops when his grandson, Aaron Stavely, married, in 1741, the daughter of Rev. Patrick Vance the Presbyterian minister of Ray in Co. Donegal. There were three children of the marriage born into the home at Ferniskey, near Kells. William, the subject of our study was the eldest, and was born in 1743.[1] Two daughters, Esther, Mrs. Agnew, and Eliza, Mrs. Cussack, both emigrated to America. In a godly home, with both parents committed to the Covenanting Cause, William Stavely was brought up in an atmosphere of faith and prayer, and, at an early age, dedicated to the ministry of the Covenanting Church. He received his early education at a Classical School in Antrim and in 1760 was enrolled as a matriculated student in the University of Glasgow. He completed a course of study in Arts that satisfied the Scottish Reformed Presbytery. He did not, however, qualify for the Master's degree. The possible reason for this may have been his unwillingness to sign a formal declaration that was in conflict with his principles. He received his theological training at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Hall in Paisley under the tuition of Rev. John MacMillan II and

was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Irish Reformed Presbytery in 1769.

After just over two years as a probationer, during which time he assisted William Martin, William James and Matthew Linn in their extensive ministries in the Counties of Antrim, Derry and East Donegal, he received a Call from the newly-organised congregation of Lower Down. It was a widely scattered congregation and the Call bore the unusual titles :– "From the Covenanted Electors between the Bridge of Dromore and Donaghadee in the County of Down". It was a well-supported Call by any standard at that time, and was signed by 92 persons, mostly heads of families.[2]

The Ordination took place at Conlig, County Down, in August 1772. The ministers of the Irish Reformed Presbytery who took part in the service were William Martin of Kellswater, William James of Bready and Thomas Hamilton of Faughan. The Covenanters in 1772 had taken over the meeting house in Conlig that had formerly belonged to the Secession Congregation, which, in that year had moved into the town of Newtownards. This congregation subsequently became the Presbyterian Congregation of Second Newtownards.[3]

In 1776, Knockbracken, on the outskirts of Belfast, became the centre of Mr. Stavely's work and a meeting house was erected there. His effective evangelical ministry was exercised in the Counties of Down, Armagh and Monaghan and within a few years congregations were established at Dromore and Rathfriland, Co. Down; Drumillar and Ballylane, Co. Armagh and Fairview and Ballybay in Co. Monaghan. In 1800 he was installed in his home congregation of Kellswater, Co. Antrim. From this centre he continued his faithful and zealous work until his death on the 7th May, 1825. He is buried at Kellswater.

In 1776 he married Miss Mary Donald of Marymount, near Antrim. Their home was at Annsborough House in the village of Newtownbreda. He had a comfortable income, for in addition to his stipend of £50 a year, there were some 20 acres of valuable land at Annsborough House, plus the rents from his own farm at Ferniskey and of his wife's at Marymount. Eight children were born to the marriage, one son and seven daughters. The son, William John, became the minister of Dervock and Kilraughts

(1804-1861). Of the daughters, Nancy was the wife of Andrew Ferguson, of Cookstown, whose son, William Stavely Ferguson, was a noted Reformed Presbyterian minister at Grange, Co. Tyrone, from 1844 to 1894. Esther married Simon Cameron, minister of Ballylaggan from 1817 to 1855. The other members of the family were Margaret who married Francis McMillan, Ballymena; Mary, William Clugston of Antrim; Eleanor, died aged 31; Eliza, married John Graham of Bailiesmills; and Jane who was unmarried and lived at Marymount.

THE PREACHER

William Stavely was a preacher of exceptional gifts. A study of his sermon manuscripts shows that his preaching was a practical exposition of Scripture applied with fervent evangelical appeal. A sermon on Revelation 17 verse 14 on the theme "War Proclaimed and Victory Assured" is typical of his preaching.[4] He deals with the royal character of Christ, His authority as King of Kings, His victory over sin and Satan, the character and qualifications of those who share this victory and the grounds of assurance for all who are in His service. In an age of Moderatism this style of preaching contrasted with the prevailing mode and was warmly received by the people of Ulster. Dr. J. Seaton Reid, the noted Presbyterian historian, commends the fidelity with which Stavely and his colleagues preached the Gospel at the end of the 18th century and asserts that this fidelity was undoubtedly the grand secret of their progress.[5]

THE POLEMICIST

William Stavely had the keen mind of a controversialist. His first literary publication was a pamphlet entitled "Truth Restored, or The New Mode of Swearing Religious Oaths by Touching and Kissing the Book Examined".[6] This was a burning question among Ulster Presbyterians at the time. In 1764 Rev. Thomas Clarke, Secession Minister of Cahans, Co. Monaghan, was fined 40 shillings with a subsequent period of imprisonment for refusing to take the Oath in Court by kissing the Bible. Stavely's pamphlet is a defence of the Scriptural manner of swearing oaths by an uplifted hand. It was almost a century before the plea was accepted and Government approval given to the simple, biblical method.

For the most part, however, Stavely's polemic was directed against the Seceders. Though they had much in common with the Covenanters, the Seceders' claim to be the true successors of the Scottish Covenanters was resented by the Reformed Presbyterians who, in their Societies, had maintained a witness for Covenanting principles for more than 40 years before the Secession of 1733. The possibility of a closer understanding between the two Churches vanished in 1783 when the Seceders decided to accept a share of the Regium Donum.[7] Stavely's criticism of this decision was sharp and unrelenting.

Stavely also took note of the anti-Christian philosophy that spread over Europe in the wake of the French Revolution of 1789. The exponent of this philosophy was Tom Paine who published a rather crude but extremely vigorous book entitled "The Age of Reason". This view of contemporary Deists was answered by Stavely in a 144 page pamphlet published in 1796 entitled "An Appeal to Light". The first part of his argument follows the line taken by Rev. Charles Leslie in his "Short and Easy Method with Deists". The remainder of the work is original and deals with the Divine Origin of the Scriptures with suggestions of suitable methods for Bible Study. He generously commends Paine as a friend of the liberties of men and offers to meet him in public debate on the Authority of the Word of God.

THE PRISONER

In the complicated political situation at the close of the 18th century the Covenanters were in an extremely difficult position. They had been outspoken critics of the British Government and their refusal to take an unqualified Oath of Allegiance to the Crown put them under suspicion of being in sympathy with the rebellion of 1798. In the earlier threat of a French invasion Covenanters had supported the Volunteer Movement. Stavely was Captain of the Drumbracken Volunteers and some of his members served under his leadership. He appeared at Drumbo on the 26th December, 1792 as a 'reviewing general' in the Volunteers.[8] When he and his colleagues were convinced that the Movement was taking a dangerous trend and was likely to become an instrument of the rebel United Irishmen, they took steps to make the position of the Church clear. Stavely was sent to Scotland to consult with the Scottish Reformed Presbytery and on his return the Irish

Church issued a "Seasonable and Necessary Information" in the following terms :

> At a critical time such as this when the public mind is so agitated and so many false alarms are in circulation, we, the members of the Reformed Church, called Presbyterian Dissenters (reproachfully called 'Mountain Men') hold it our duty to step forward from conscience and publicly declare that we hold in the highest abhorrence and detestation all tumultuous and disorderly meetings, and we utterly disclaim all connection with such, whether publicly or privately held, when anything is said or done that is prejudicial to the peace, the safety or property of any individual or civil society.
>
> Done in the name of the Reformed Churches in the Counties of Antrim and Down.[9]

In spite of this declaration members of the Church became involved in the 1798 rising. Daniel English was executed at Connor and Watty Graham at Maghera. Stavely accompanied English to the scaffold.[10] Two of Stavely's colleagues, James McKinney of Dervock and William Gibson of Kellswater, though disclaiming all connection with the United Irishmen, had to flee for their lives and found refuge in America.[11] Another minister, Joseph Orr of Bannside, was under arrest for a time. But the full fury of Government opposition fell upon Stavely. The Sabbath worship service on the 25th June, 1797, in his Church at Knockbracken, was interrupted by Colonel Barber and a troop of cavalry who had been informed that arms were hidden in the meeting house. Stavely was arrested and imprisoned for two months.[12] The charge of concealing arms in the Church was never proved and he was released though he was carefully watched by the Government which was concerned about his tremendous influence with his people and his outspoken criticism of government action.

In 1798 soldiers, returning from the Battle of Ballynahinch, visited his manse on the night of June 13. They ransacked the house, ruined the furniture and took Stavely a prisoner to Belfast. He was detained for two months in the Artillery Barracks and a further four months on a prison ship in Belfast Lough. His account of his arrest and the treatment he received is given at length in a letter written in the Artillery Barracks and quoted by Samuel Ferguson in his Brief Biographical Sketches.[13] He claims that he was savagely ill-used by the military who threatened to shoot him. He was offered his liberty in return for information and a willingness

to remove to a country not at war with the king. He made a solemn protestation of his innocence. He denied any involvement with the rebels. He asserted that he had never taken an oath to the United Irishmen and had not occupied any place or post among them. For these reasons he refused General Nugent's offer of release.

He was released in December, 1798. Nothing had been proved against him and he was convinced that he was the victim of a spiteful conspiracy. He recalled that on the night before his arrest he was visited by a man who later turned out to be a government informer, who tried to persuade him to send a message to the rebel army. His friendship with William Orr, whom he accompanied to the scaffold at Carrickfergus on 17th October, 1797, and his presence at the execution of Daniel English, meant that he was always under suspicion.

THE PASTOR

On his release from prison Stavely found that his influence in Knockbracken had diminished. Some of the people blamed him for bringing trouble on them by his vigorous preaching and for his outspoken criticism of the Government. He accepted a Call to Kellswater and was installed in 1800 to serve the joint congregation of Kellswater and Cullybackey until 1813, and the Kellswater congregation until his death in 1825.

When the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland was constituted at Cullybackey in 1811, Mr. Stavely was appointed its first Moderator. He preached an appropriate sermon on the text : Hebrews 3, verse 6; "Christ as a Son over His own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end". His son, Rev. William John Stavely of Kilraughts was the Synod's first stated Clerk.[14]

Rev. Samuel Ferguson, his great-grandson, who had access to family documents, tells us that he was a tall dignified man with dark penetrating eyes and a strong but musical voice. His physique was outstanding, and in a ministry of fifty-three years he never once (apart from the time of his imprisonment) failed to preach on the Sabbath. He prepared carefully for his pulpit ministry, but the main feature in his preparation was his personal devotion.

He is best remembered by his family for his gentleness, by his opponents for his firmness and fairness and by his Church as an ardent pioneer, an uncompromising witness and an outstanding man of God.

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THE COVENANT CHILD AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

by Robert L. W. McCollum

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One of the prevalent evils in our world, as we near the end of the twentieth century, is child abuse. Dr. Joel Nederhood, speaking within the context of the North American scene, stated in a recent broadcast, "Children are being mistreated these days on the most fundamental level; our society feels that children are secondary and that the rights and privileges of adults are primary".

The neglect and abuse of children, either physical, spiritual or both, often find expression in our society. Christian parents can be guilty of neglecting their children by allowing their lives to be dominated by what is considered important Christian work. The Christian Church can be guilty of abuse towards its covenant youth by regarding them merely as suitable subjects for its evangelistic programme. This article is an attempt to redress this imbalance.

The term 'covenant child' refers to the offspring of a couple, at least one of whom is a believer. When God established His covenant with Abram it was not in isolation from his children. "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you" (Gen. 17 : 7 cf Acts 2 : 39). It is clear from Scripture that God makes a distinction between the children of His people and the children of the world. This distinction becomes apparent when we consider the relationship which the children of believers have to the Church. To understand this relationship it is necessary to consider the place they have within the Church. This leads to a consideration of the composition of the Church and who are appropriate subjects to be admitted into its membership.

Admission to the Church

Adults, previously outside the covenant community, who profess faith in Christ and demonstrate a willingness to submit to His Lordship, are recognised and received as members of the Church through baptism. Baptism is the New Testament counterpart of the Old Testament rite of circumcision. Abraham was circumcised as an outward visible sign of his covenant standing with God. "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised . . ." (Rom. 4 : 11).

This sign was not merely reserved for adults entering the covenant community by faith. It was also administered to the children of believers (Gen. 17 : 10, 11). Abraham administered the sign of covenant status to his infant son. "When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him" (Gen. 21 : 4). In this manner the child Isaac was recognised as a covenant child and accepted within the membership of the covenant community. The coming of Christ and the fulfilment of many Old Testament prophecies did not radically change the status of the children of believers. Peter was careful to point this out to his Jewish congregation on the day of Pentecost. "The promise is for you and your children . . ." (Acts 2 : 39). The Old Testament rites of Circumcision and the Passover found fulfilment in Christ, but their meaning still finds expression in the sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which our Lord instituted to replace them (Matt. 28 : 18-20; Col. 2 : 11-13; I Cor. 11 : 23-27). Since we believe that the children of believers in the New Testament period of the Church have a claim to all the rights and privileges of their Old Testament counterparts, baptism is administered to them. Hence the children of believers, through baptism, are also recognised and received as members of the Church (I Cor. 7 : 14).

By following this pattern of admission into the Church we have a body comprised of those who have professed faith in Christ, together with their children. Most people have no difficulty with the first part of this definition, but some would question the inclusion of children within the believing community. The Church is the body of Christ (I Cor. 12 : 27). Those who make up the body of Christ have been called out of the world into union and communion with Jesus Christ. This becomes effectual through

the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration (Titus 3 : 5). The question is asked by some whether the doctrine of regeneration can apply to infants. It is suggested that the purity of the church would be better served by excluding children from membership. To handle these queries we must look at the nature and composition of the New Testament Church and the doctrine of regeneration with special reference to its application to the infants of believers.

The Nature of the Church

The Second Helvetic Confession says the Church is "a company of the faithful, called and gathered out of the world; a communion of all saints, that is, of them who truly know and rightly worship and serve the true God, in Jesus Christ the Saviour, by the Word of the Holy Spirit, and who by faith are partakers of the good graces which are freely offered through Christ."[1] Since such graces as regeneration and faith are by their very nature spiritual and invisible, no man or human organisation is able infallibly to determine who are regenerate and who are not, who are true believers and who are not. It follows, therefore, that no one is able to define the precise limits of the Church. God alone can read the heart and therefore only the Lord knows them that are His. This is true irrespective of the position adopted regarding the children of believers. It must be concluded from this that, from the human perspective, there is an aspect of invisibility that is attached to the concept of the Church. When we are thinking about the whole number of the elect we refer to the Church in its invisible aspect.

We need to note, however, that Scripture never regards the Church as an invisible entity. The Church, in the New Testament usage of the term, is the company or assembly or congregation of believers in a given geographical area, (Rom. 15 : 5, house); (Acts 8 : 1, city); (Acts 9 : 31, province). What is often described as the visible Church the New Testament simply calls the Church. Care must, therefore, be taken not to adopt an unbiblical view of the local church. Professor John Murray makes this point when he writes

> We may not abandon this constitutive principle, we may not accommodate our definition in order to make allowance for the fact that some make the profession who do not have the faith and who enter into the fellowship without the bond that constitutes it.[2]

When Paul defines the church at Corinth as those "sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy"(I Cor. 1 : 2), he does not conceive of the church in broader terms so as to distinguish between the church and those sanctified and called. This takes on greater relevance when, in chapter 5, he proceeds to deal with those who had made Christian profession and who were in the fellowship of the church but who by reason of gross sin were to be excluded from its communion. The New Testament understanding of the Church is therefore broad enough to include the possibility of some within her ranks who are not savingly united to Christ. The implications of this for the infants of believing parents are obvious. There is no difficulty, on the basis of the New Testament's understanding of the Church, in including them within the membership, even though in later life some may reject the faith.

When considering covenant children in the membership of a Church it is wrong to assume that they are all regenerate. That assumption can never be made about any roll of members. Equally it would be wrong to make the assumption that because a child is not old enough to articulate his faith he is therefore unregenerate. To clarify this point we must consider the doctrine of regeneration in its application to the children of believers.

Children and Regeneration

John Murray succinctly defines regeneration :

> It is the Holy Spirit working directly, efficaciously and irresistibly upon man's heart and mind making the man over again, and creating him anew after the image of Christ in holiness and righteousness of the truth.[3]

This change which God effects in man is so radical in its nature that the Bible employs such dynamic terms as new birth (Jn. 3 : 3, 5) new creation (2 Cor. 5 : 17) regeneration (Tit. 3 : 5) and renewal (Tit. 3 : 5) to describe it. It is only as a consequence of this sovereign, gracious work of the Holy Spirit in the life of any person that he sees (understands) (Jn. 3 : 3, Jn. 3 : 5) spiritual things and enters into the kingdom of God upon repentance and faith (conversion).

The sovereignty of the Spirit's work in regeneration is emphasised in Scripture by use of the analogy of the wind.

"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear the sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (Jn 3 : 8)

The Holy Spirit is sovereign. Man does not determine those upon whom the Holy Spirit will operate with regenerating power nor when He will operate. Therefore, it cannot be said that there is an appropriate time in a man's life when the Holy Spirit will come in renewing grace. Since the Spirit of God is sovereign, it can legitimately be concluded that the Holy Spirit may carry out His work of regeneration in the life of the sinner, at any time from conception to death. To show that this is no mere theological theory, we will illustrate with several Biblical examples. In the Old Testament we have the example of Jeremiah about whom we read,

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." (Jer. 1 : 5)

And then in language which leaves no room for doubt we have in Luke 1 : 5 the statement about John the Baptist,

"He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother's womb" (N.A.S.V.).

These two examples indicate that regeneration can take place before a child is born. The dying thief on the cross, who suddenly and dramatically showed a complete change of attitude, provides an example of spiritual renewal close to death. (Matt. 27 : 41; Lk. 23 : 40-42).

These facts about regeneration open up the possibility of children being regenerate before they reach the age of understanding. On the basis of the covenant promises (Gen. 17 : 7; Acts 2 : 28, 29) it would be quite proper for parents to pray for the salvation of their child right from the moment they are aware of his existence. They are entitled to pray that, if it is God's will, their child might have his spiritual birthday before his physical birthday, that he might be regenerate while yet in his mother's womb. Some Christian parents show little concern for the spiritual well-being of their children until they reach adolescence and then they consider it an appropriate time for God to save them. Such thinking is completely foolish. Salvation is of the Lord! And the breath of God that blows on a lad of 16 or a lady of 60 in regenerating power is able to blow upon a tiny baby in his mother's womb. There were

parents in our Lord's day who had a spiritual concern for their little ones. "People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them." (Mark 10 : 13)

The word used for little children in the original means "infant" or "baby". It refers to children of the youngest and tenderest age. The same word is used in Luke 1 : 41, 44; Luke 2 : 12, 16 and I Peter 2 : 2. Mark 10 : 13 relates therefore to babes in arms being brought by their parents to Jesus. The disciples rebuked Jesus because they reasoned that He was too busy to pay attention to infants. The disciples possibly reasoned as follows : "Because these little ones are weak and inarticulate they have no place in the programme of Jesus Christ – there is no place for them in the kingdom of His grace." But they were wrong.

"When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these'." (Mark 10 : 14)

How these words cut across the thinking of the disciples and how they cut across much evangelical thinking today!

In Mark 10 : 16 we read that Jesus received these little ones, put his hands on them and blessed them. The nature of this blessing cannot be dogmatically asserted, but all the evidence points to the conclusion that Christ was blessing these children with His grace (i.e., the grace of regeneration). This conclusion is supported by the best commentators. John Calvin writes

> . . . what other prayer did he utter for them than that they should be received into the number of the children of God. It follows then that they were regenerated by the Spirit in the hope of salvation . . . they were partakers of the spiritual gifts represented by baptism . . .[4]

Matthew Henry comes to the same conclusion :

> The strongest believer lives not so much by apprehending Christ as by being apprehended by Christ and this the least child is incapable of doing. If they cannot stretch out their hands to him; yet he can lay His hands on them and so make them his own and own them for his own.[5]

On the basis of this biblical material relating to regeneration and covenant children it should not be considered strange that it is God's purpose to include such children within the membership of

the Church. The nurture of such little ones for God is the subject which must be reviewed.

Covenant Children Within the Home

We have already established that covenant children are recognised and received as members of the visible Church by baptism, and should be treated accordingly. Christian parents, understanding the status of their children, should relate to them as being part of that Christian family unit. They do not stand outside of it and beyond it until such times as they can prove that they are in it. Rather, when God is worshipped in the home, the children are very much part of that religious exercise. Joshua's testimony is relevant

"But as for me and my household we will serve the Lord "(Jos. 24 : 15b)

Christian parents will teach their children constantly to love the Lord their God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their strength and they will constantly be showing their children the ways by which they can show their love to God. In like manner they will teach their children the Word of God, emphasizing that sin offends God. They will seek to help their children to recognise temptations and show the importance of seeking God's grace to overcome them. When they do sin they will point them to Christ's sacrifice for sin and the forgiveness which is to be found in Him.

God uses means to fulfil what He has promised as is illustrated in His testimony about Abraham :

"For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." (Gen. 18 : 19)

It is as parents are faithful to their covenant responsibilities towards their children that they can look forward to them being covenant-keepers, in fulfilment of what God has promised (Gen. 17 : 7).

It must be emphasised that such nurturing of covenant children in the faith does not obviate their need of regeneration. The words

of Jesus to Nicodemus have universal application :

"I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3 : 3).

Christian parents, however, having prayed earnestly for the salvation of their child from conception, pleading on the basis of the Covenant promise in Genesis 17 : 7 and having consistently communicated God's truth can, with a spirit of prayerful anticipation and expectancy, look forward to what was symbolised in their child's baptism becoming a reality in his life. With a true spirit of faith they may believe that what God has promised He will fulfil and look for signs of grace in the life of their little one. At no time can Christian parents presume that their child will be regenerate. Presumption is no part of true faith. Often God tests the faith of parents. Regeneration does not always occur in infancy. It does not always occur in youth. And sometimes parents do not live to see the answer to their prayers, their children coming to faith even in old age. There are those children, like Esau, who despise their birthright and who become breakers of the covenant and for whom God's righteous judgment will be reserved. Such exceptions ought never to cause parents to lose sight of what all parents should earnestly pray for, the regeneration of their offspring in the tender, formative years of life.

John Murray explains for us the implications of regeneration in the life of an infant.

> Where regeneration takes place in the case of an infant there is the immediate transition from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God, and even though intelligent faith cannot be in exercise, nevertheless, there is that which we may and must call the germ of faith. The regenerate infant is not under the dominion of sin, is not a child of wrath, but a child of God and a member of his kingdom. He grows up in the nurture of the Lord in the highest sense of that term. It will take years, of course, for the infant concerned to arrive at explicit consciousness of the implications of that regeneration and of the salvation it involves.[6]

This type of spiritual renewal in tender years is not dramatic or sensational and in most instances will not be registered on the memory. And in later years, when such children come to acknowledge the fact of God's grace in their lives, they testify that they never remember a time when they did not love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Covenant Children Within the Church

Much of what has already been said about how the children of believers should be regarded in the covenant family applies equally to their position in the Church. One of the best statements on this subject is found in the directory for public worship of God, prepared by the Westminster Assembly.

> The seed and posterity of the faithful, born within the church have, by their birth, interest in the covenant, and a right to the seal of it and to the outward privileges of the church, under the gospel, no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament : the covenant of grace, for substance, being the same; and the grace of God, and the consolation of believers, more plentiful than before . . . That children, by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers; and that all who are baptised in the name of Christ, do renounce, and by their baptism are bound to fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh.[7]

Members of the Church will therefore not only pray for the children to be recipients of regeneration in their tender years, but they will prayerfully trust God to answer their prayers on the basis of His covenant promise. They will also by their example, teaching and encouragement, seek to be a means of much blessing in the lives of the children of the Church.

This covenant status will also influence the minister in his attitude and approach to the lambs of his flock. As he addresses them, his remarks will be governed by the fact that these children have been received into the covenant community. He will speak to them about the significance of their baptism and what was anticipated and expected on that occasion. He will say to them that the members of the church, their parents included, are looking forward to their making a public commitment of their faith in Christ and being added to the communicant membership of the church.

The Episcopal Church employs the term 'confirmation', which carries within its meaning a key to understanding what is expected in the lives of the children of the Church. When young people are received into the communicant membership of the Church by confession of their faith in Christ it is a 'confirmation' that what

was actually anticipated at their baptism has in fact taken place in their lives.

Taking into account all that has been stated about the covenant child, it must again be stressed that regeneration can never be assumed. Although the call to come into the communicant membership of the Church goes out to all young people of the Church it can only be responded to by those young people who are trusting Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord. The elders will seek to ascertain if that vital relationship exists. They will not necessarily look for a *dramatic* conversion because generally speaking that is not normative for children within the covenant framework. John Murray makes this point when he writes,

> We must not, therefore, conceive of the regenerate infant as regenerated in infancy and then converted when he reaches years of understanding and discretion. No, not at all! When the infant is regenerated, that infant is converted in the sense that there occurs in the infant mind something which in the rudimentary sphere corresponds to conversion, that is to say, the direction in which the heart and mind – germinal and rudimentary though they be – are turned, is towards God, towards faith in him, love and obedience to Him. As the infant grows up under the sanctifying influences of the indwelling Holy Spirit, he responds in expanding experience and to increasing knowledge in a way consistent with his membership of the kingdom of God; in a way consistent with the indwelling of the Spirit as the constantly directing and controlling agency, he grows up to hate sin and love righteousness. If in the case of unregenerate infants we can say, as we must, that they go astray from the womb speaking lies, so of the regenerate infants we must say that from the point of regeneration they in principle walk in the way of holiness, speaking the truth. In a word, they are holy, just as others are unholy.[8]

So what the elders will be looking for is a credible profession of faith. They will be looking for evidence in the life of a hatred of sin and a love for righteousness and a desire to serve Christ in a faithful and obedient life.

The covenant child, having publicly professed his personal commitment to serve Christ, is therefore welcomed to the table of the Lord to partake of the Lord's Supper. There is no set age at which this occurs. Philip Henry encouraged his children to make public profession of their faith and go forward to the Lord's table at 16, but some young people, at a much earlier age, demonstrate

a clear heart knowledge of Christ as their Saviour and ought not to be denied the Lord's Supper because they have not reached a certain age. On the other hand there are those, even in teenage years, who are unsure about their spiritual state and if they cannot, with conscience, testify to being savingly united to Christ, then they ought not to be admitted to communicant membership. However, they should again be reminded that because of their baptism they are obligated to depart from sin and follow Christ. Some covenant youth may object to being obligated in this way without prior consultation. William Hendriksen deals with the objection and he answers by comparing covenant citizenship to national citizenship.

> Would you really say that it is not fair that you were born a citizen of the country in which you live – under obligation of loyalty and service to this country and also under obligation to help discharge the debts which it has promised to pay – seeing that you were never consulted in regard to the place of your birth? On the contrary, you accept the honour of being a born citizen of your country. You accept it together with all the duties this involves. Similarly, the covenant child should gladly own and accept his covenant responsibility; a life of faith in its most comprehensive sense.[9]

It is a source of great joy to the elders of the church when they see covenant youth fulfilling their covenant responsibilities by commiting their lives to Christ and serving Him in the world.

The Experience of Covenant Youth

Many covenant children testify to experiencing conversion in their teenage years or even later. While we can never determine when the Holy Spirit works within the heart of a child, the covenant and the covenant promises lead us to expect the majority of covenant children to experience regeneration in childhood. There is often conflict between the teaching of Scripture and what people profess to have experienced. In seeking to resolve this conflict, we state positively that our theology is not determined by experience, the Word of God being our rule of faith. We therefore hold to the conclusions reached and offer some reasons to account for the present situation.

(a) Many Christian parents are not familiar with the implications of the covenant for their child. Parents are often praying for a

future dramatic experience of conversion instead of praying that their child may know God's saving grace early in life. Such expectation will affect how they relate to their child and will affect the response given. The words "according to your faith be it unto you" (Mt. 9 : 29) are relevant in this connection.

(b) The Christian community in general tends to be greatly influenced by the publicity that is given to those whose conversion has been dramatic. The impression can be given that unless other conversions are of a similar nature they are not genuine experiences of God's grace. This can lead young people to 'go forward' at an emotionally charged meeting. This, subsequently, is interpreted as the day and hour of their conversion when in fact it may simply have been a public expression of their commitment to follow Christ.

(c) The Church in reaching out to the unsaved often fails to distinguish between the work of evangelism in general and the spiritual nature of the covenant seed God has placed within her bounds. Occasionally in Sabbath School classes a zealous teacher seeks to pressurise covenant children into premature commitments. Ministers can sometimes speak to the children of the Church as if they were outside the Church. Such experiences can often cause young people to have a spiritual identity crisis.

(d) Many covenant children fail to understand, or have not been sufficiently grounded in, the implications of their baptism. They adopt an attitude of indifference to the Church during adolescent years and even debate in their minds whether or not they will 'join the Church'. They fail to appreciate that they are already part of it.

(e) The cultural and philosophical climate of Western society, in which young people often resent parental decisions, militates against the corporate identity of the family. This in turn breeds a spirit of individualism which does not fit easily within the context of Covenant theology.

These are some of the reasons why the experience of covenant youth can be so divergent from what our concept of their place in the covenant family would lead us to expect. There is an urgent need to rediscover the covenant status of the Church's youth. When this is understood and its implications accepted for the

training and nurturing of covenant children then, by God's grace, conscious commitment to Christ will become more normative within the life of the Church.

References

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2. *Christian Baptism*, p. 42.
3. *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 171.
4. *A Harmony of the Gospels*, vol. 2, p. 252.
5. Matthew Henry's Commentary, Matthew 19 : 13-15.
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8. Op. cit., p. 200.
9. *The Covenant of Grace*, p. 58.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1986, Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, Oxford University Press, 1988. Pbk. 464pp. £6.95.

Stephen Neill's classic introduction to New Testament criticism has been used with profit by several generations of students since it first appeared in 1964 and this re-publication and expansion is very much to be welcomed. Dr. Tom Wright, University Lecturer in New Testament Studies at Oxford and author of a recent useful commentary on Colossians and Philemon, has modified Bishop Neill's text by updating references and making minor alterations in the light of current research. He has also written a completely new final chapter which deals with developments in the last 25 years. The resulting volume seems set for a new lease of life.

The book, designed for the intelligent non-expert, seeks to describe and assess the various ways in which the New Testament has been approached over the past 125 years. The method of study is selective rather than comprehensive, concentrating on major figures and seminal works and thus avoiding the tedium of a glorified bibliography. Brief and well-chosen footnotes provide suggestions for further study and a compact index helps the reader to locate areas of interest. Each of the nine chapters deals with a particular epoch or development.

Neill takes us steadily through the 19th century, from Baur and the Tubingen school, through the Cambridge trio of Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort to the liberalism of Harnack and Schweitzer's (in)famous "Quest for The Historical Jesus." We are informed about early attempts to solve the so-called "Synoptic Problem" and to show that the apostle Paul was a corrupter of the simple idealism of the carpenter of Nazareth. With the 20th century came Barth, and then the "form-critics" Schmidt, Dibelius and Bultmann, whose work led on to the rise of redaction–criticism. More recent developments include the investigation of the Jewish background of Jesus and the gospels, the linguistic criticism of much previous exegesis and lexicography by James Barr and a

great upsurge of interest in the theology of Paul. Many other topics are covered and no issue of major significance seems to have been omitted.

This volume has several outstanding virtues. It is written with an enviable clarity. Both Neill and Wright have the rare gift of being able to simplify without being simplistic. Complex questions are analysed and explained in language which the non-expert can grasp with a minimum of effort.

It is also compulsively readable. New Testament Criticism is not a subject which at first sight seems calculated to make the pulses race with excitement. Yet, in the hands of Stephen Neill, who appears to have enjoyed a personal acquaintance with most of this century's major scholars, we find ourselves drawn into a narrative of absorbing interest. He makes the great personalities live for us, with their gifts and achievements, personal idiosyncrasies and interests. He is incapable of writing a dull line.

Readers of this journal will not agree with all the judgments expressed by the authors. They are too gentle, on occasion, with men who have inflicted enormous damage on the cause of Christ. British scholarship has been shackled for a long time by an overdose of politeness, a reluctance to call a spade a spade. A little less "scholarly" detachment and a little more passionate conviction would have been welcome to this reviewer. Neill seems to reserve intemperate language for "fundamentalists." But, when that *caveat* has been entered, it is nevertheless the case that many critical views are trenchantly dealt with in these pages. The careful reader will not only receive a thorough education in what has been happening in the world of New Testament scholarship, but will find his faith strengthened by the way in which huge theoretical structures, apparently menacing the trustworthiness of Scripture, are decisively yet fairly undermined and brought crashing to the ground.

Indeed the abiding impression left by the book is one of a certain futility. So much learning, well over one hundred years of prodigious effort – and yet with how pitiably little in the way of positive results! Speaking of 19th century German theologians, men of immense scholarship and industry, Neill comments : *"Hardly any of them have made a contribution of permanent value to the study"* (p. 207). The same epitaph could be written

over the work of many of their successors. The unexamined presupposition which links them is that of anti-supernaturalism – the belief that this world is a closed system in which God does not and cannot operate. Such a prejudice vitiates almost all they write, fatally distorting their approach to the inspired documents which they seek to study. In this realm, as in many others, *"God has made foolish the wisdom of the world."*

Edward Donnelly

Christian Ethics in Health Care, John Wilkinson, Handsel Press, 1988, 510pp. £27.50.

This is a 'big' book. I refer not only to its size, but also to its subject matter and to the author's treatment of it. There are three main parts, with a degree of logical sequence, giving a total of eighteen chapters. Part 1, (5 chs.), is an outline of Christian ethics; Part 3, (10 chs.), is a practical application of these principles to every day situations; while Part 2 is a short history (3 chs.) of health care ethics from ancient to modern times in which the practice of Medicine is shown to have been variously considered as an art, a science, a vocation, a profession, a service and a livelihood. Quotations are cited from Hippocrates, Hammurabi, Talmudic studies, and more modern documents such as the Declaration of Geneva which is intended to be a modern version of the Hippocratic Oath, the Oath of the Soviet Physician, the Handbook of Medical Ethics, published in 1980 by the B.M.A., Declarations made by International bodies representing Psychiatry, Nursing care and Dental practice, etc. Here is a fine collection of relevant material well worth perusal, not only by the new physician and other professionals directly involved in health care, but also by the theologian and pastor who is inevitably involved with parents and matters pertaining to the beginning of life, with tragic situations which occur within families in the course of life and ultimately in ministering to the sick and dying as they bid farewell to this life.

The interesting feature about each of the terms used for a physician, and the association of numerous oaths and declarations, is the implication that in practising medicine there has to be a standard of values and a code of conduct. Attention is drawn to

the close relationship between character and conduct for "the basis of professional morality lies in the trustworthiness of the professional person." What controls and regulates the conduct of a profession, it is said, are rules of etiquette, codes of conduct, philosophical and religious beliefs. On this last point, the philosophy of a particular society, and what one believes about God, man and goodness will determine one's ethical ideals and practice. The author contends that in recent years both society and the practice of medicine have changed so dramatically, that trust between doctor and patient has been eroded, and with the advance of medical technology doctors are tempted to "play God."

After glancing at the Contents, this reviewer began by reading chapter 3 because of its title – 'The Presuppositions of Christian Ethics'. It opens with the words, "The open mind does not exist." That such is the case is then ably illustrated with quotations from philosophers and writers such as MacIntyre and Brunner. Here is one of the many strengths of this book from a Christian point of view, in contrast to many other writers on this subject, who either deny the premise, or dismiss all other views which are contrary to their own (especially Christian), as not being worthy of consideration by an intelligent mind. However, Wilkinson proceeds with conviction and courtesy to firmly establish the Biblical doctrine of man as being the basis for Christian health care. He considers man as created, as fallen, as redeemed, as perfected and draws the conclusion that only when man is respected as a creature in the 'image of God' (he explains this term), can we adequately minister to the whole person. Darwin was concerned with biological man; Freud with sexual man; Marx with economic man, whereas Christianity is concerned with man's being as well as his doing.

Other chapters in Part One deal with the Sources and Motives in Christian Ethics, such as natural morality, Christian experience and ethical situations. The motives include obedience to the law of Christ, gratitude to God and seeking the glory of God, but that which motivates the Christian above all else is true Christian love for God and neighbour which pursues the highest good for others. The Characteristics of Christian Ethics are stated as being Relational, Absolute, Comprehensive and Redemptive. By Relational is meant that man stands in a relationship to God. In a

non-relational ethic the centre of the picture is man himself who stands unrelated to anything or anyone outside himself. The Christian ethic is both 'theocentric' and 'theonomous', i.e., from being man-centred or self-centred it is God-centred, and God-governed because, unlike the Kantian or Utilitarian view, it is not autonomous nor merely pragmatic but acts in accordance with the moral law of God.

It would be totally misleading to give the impression that this book is more about theology and philosophy than health care. The author took his M.D. at Edinburgh and is an F.R.C.P. In fact, the major part of the work is devoted to explaining methods and treatments used in the various fields of medicine. This is clearly written and gives a vivid picture of the situations which actually arise in medical practice. He deals with Pregnancy – its prevention, promotion and termination. There is a chapter on the problems associated with Human Experimentation and Consent. The Christian attitude to the allocation of resources and professional relationships is discussed at some length. The Christian view of death and many of the matters pertaining to the close of life – intensive care, resuscitation, organ transplants, arguments for and against euthanasia – all receive attention. The final chapter looks at Aids.

Each case is considered within a Christian framework and then possible solutions are suggested. Take for example the case of infertility. Is human fertility a right or a gift? The Bible does not speak of a woman's right to become pregnant. "Children are a gift from the Lord" (Ps. 127 : 3). However, this does not mean that a couple should deprive themselves of all the information and help that modern medicine offers to the infertile. There are seven ways of approaching the problem, some of which pose real ethical difficulties for the Christian. As well as the danger of transmitting disease from gamete donation, the introduction of a third party violates the basic Christian principle of marriage, i.e., the integrity of the relationship between husband and wife. So the question facing the Christian is not what *can* be done, but what *should* be done?

Dr. Wilkinson admits that writing a book on the ethics of health care is like trying to hit a moving target, but in the opinion of this reviewer this book will remain on target for a very long time. It is

a most comprehensive treatment of the subject from a Christian point of view. It is scholarly, clearly written, and with questions for discussion is an ideal book for both student and teacher.

Harold G. Cunningham

Medicine in Crisis, A Christian Response. Edited by Ian L. Brown and Nigel M de S Cameron, Rutherford House, 1988. Pb. 128pp. £5.90.

Medicine is in flux and the ethical principles on which it has rested have changed dramatically in the last 25 years. In this compendium of nine essays by seven different contributors a very useful attempt is made to document these changes, pinpoint the fundamental principles which underly them and create awareness of some of their logical implications for the practice of modern medicine.

Fundamental to this volume is the recognition that the Western World is no longer influenced by Christianity as it once was. Changing principles and convictions ultimately lead to changing practices, and medicine is no exception. New procedures to-day, which would have been considered outrageous in a former generation, often do not even provoke discussion as value systems have radically altered. The Hippocratic and Judaeo-Christian system based its values on the "sanctity" of human life and saw the "healing" of the patient as its fundamental priority. Modern medicine has discreetly altered its guiding ethics to those of "respect" for human life and "relief" of suffering. While in many situations the practical consequences of these two ethical systems are identical, this is not always so, and inevitably there is a conflict between the sanctity of life and relief of suffering, e.g., abortion and euthanasia. The new concept of "respect for life" which appears to honour the patient, actually removes from him his most precious possession, his absolute right to exist. His continued existence is a recurring management decision for his physician and relatives based on "their" perception of what is "respect for the patient".

James Philip argues convincingly from Scripture for the sanctity of human life and repudiates the philosophy of modern "so called

humanitarianism" with its "ethic of disposability". He reminds us that life does not belong to man, but is given as a stewardship from God to be guarded with the utmost care and responsibility.

A practical appraisal of Genetic Engineering and In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) summarises the potential benefits and hazards associated with each. Strict regulations controlling genetic engineering are deemed to be working satisfactorily at present, though in the opinion of this reviewer it must be conceded that major malpractices may be occurring behind a cloak of secrecy. While some of the ethical problems of IVF are noted, it is regrettable that more of the principles needed to steer a righteous path through this perilous quagmire are not elucidated.

Cameron in a chilling chapter on the context of Embryo Research reminds us that the German Holocaust was preceded by a period of intellectual preconditioning which enabled certain individuals to be seen as "non-humans". It resulted in kindly family men indulging in barbaric acts of human experimentation and destruction without a qualm of conscience. The growing perception of the embryo as sub-human is a dangerous step in the same horrific direction.

The case for a National Ante-Natal Screening Programme is demonstrated to be fraught with danger to the lives of both healthy and handicapped babies. An assessment of the incidence of abortion and infanticide highlights that the promised utopia of "every child a wanted child" has simply not materialised. Child abuse and baby battering persist, marriages break down more than ever and teenage pregnancy increases dramatically. The logical sequel to abortion, infanticide or infant euthanasia is now acceptable practice for handicapped children. Often the hunger of the new born child is masked by sedative drugs and the baby literally starves to death. This growing practice reflects the increasing tendency to perceive the handicapped child as less than human and to replace the concept of "sanctity of human life" with a nebulous concept of "quality of life". This idea of course is highly subjective and heavily influenced by the degree of selfishness of the parents. The absence of a clear, moral and ethical code results in the life of the handicapped baby being at the mercy of the personal whims of the parents and medical personnel involved.

Examining the case for Euthanasia, George L. Chambers reminds the reader that no diagnosis is infallible, new medical advances often make 'incurable diseases' curable. He points out the deleterious effect available euthanasia would have on patient/doctor trust, the long term guilt problem in relatives and the almost certain surfacing of financial considerations. He reminds us that God did not grant Elijah's plea for euthanasia and points out that Scripture teaches that death is "an enemy to be destroyed" not "a friend to be embraced". He puts in clear perspective Christian responsibility when he states "It is not enough to deplore the idea of euthanasia, we must improve the care for the dying, the disabled and the disadvantaged so that the concept is redundant. Then only can society be considered compassionate and mercy will not seem to need to kill".

In the concluding chapter Ian Brown singles out the 1967 Abortion Act as being the most important influential factor on spiritual, family and societal life in recent years. It represents a "final unravelling of our Christian value system in this country". As a result society has lost all sense of the special nature of the human person made in the image of God. He roots this decay in the departure of the Church from the Word of God.

The book fittingly ends with a clarion call for Christians to be aware of what is happening, to bring every aspect of life under the authority of God's Word and to exercise responsibility in their stewardship of life both personally and corporately.

This is a timely volume, speaking out clearly, Biblically and simply on major ethical issues facing mankind. It is vitally relevant to our modern society and should be compulsory reading for all in the medical profession and those involved in pastoral counselling. Ethical decision on issues of life and death must be returned from the lap of the Medical Profession into the hands of God's Servants where they rightly belong. This book makes a valuable contribution in pursuit of this objective. The well-being of future generations depends on its warnings being heeded.

Robert C. Beckett

Covenant and Creation : An Old Testament Covenantal Theology, W. J. Dumbrell, Paternoster Press, 1984, pb. 217pp. £6.95

For those in the Reformed tradition, which views 'covenant' as the key concept around which to structure our theology of the Old Testament, and who embrace the Biblical-theological approach, this scholarly and stimulating work is surely to be welcomed. However, in approaching such a detailed, expositional and heavily footnoted work it greatly assists if the author provides a general introduction to the issues discussed or a general conclusion summarizing his position, argument and conclusions. Dumbrell plunges us immediately into detailed, often demanding exposition in which the sentence structure is sometimes too long and involved for the argument to flow smoothly. However, if the style is somewhat woodenly academic, the pattern of each chapter is excellent for we move from careful Biblical-theological exposition (in which Dumbrell interacts with a comprehensive spectrum of modern scholarship) to carefully stated summary conclusions. The great and rewarding strength of the book is that every point made arises out of exegesis. In this the author never shirks the questions and challenges posed by the 'higher critical' school. In fact, at times, he derives insights from details of their vast learning. The great beauty of his approach is that in a time when covenant studies deal largely with comparative materials (e.g. Kline), for Dumbrell "biblical theology is a discipline internal to the Canon" (p. 42).

It is at the end of the first chapter that we come to the heart of his concern and the raison d'etre of the book. Reformed theologians (who hold to the unity of the Testaments as the one unfolding revelation of God's purpose) are right in holding 'covenant' to be the unifying factor of Biblical theology. However, the problem with them (and this emerges from Dumbrell's excellent discussion of the differences between Charles Hodge and Herman Hoeksema) is that "they do not take sufficient account of precise biblical content." Thus the concept of covenant is "inadequately grounded," becoming largely a "matter of general biblical inference" (p. 46). This book is written to meet such a weakness. Thus we move through an unfolding covenant pattern, by looking in detail at what the key passages actually say in their immediate context and in the context of the whole sweep of Old Testament revelation. In particular it is fascinating to see how

the author traces the interrelationship of divine kingship and covenant as things unfold for, as he says, "the goal of covenant is divine rule over the world, recognized by mankind" (p. 42).

The book consists of five chapters, with the fifth being the grand climax. As Dumbrell writes of the covenant with Noah, he shows, by reference to the earlier material, that the covenant confirmed with him had been brought into existence by the act of creation itself. In the second chapter, on the covenant with Abraham, it is fascinating to see how Dumbrell regards this as "a redemptive response to the human dilemma which the spread of sin narratives of Genesis 3–11 have posed" (p. 47). In the chapter on the Sinai covenant, such matters as the role of law, the nature of worship and the concept of 'rest' are dealt with. In the fourth chapter Dumbrell discusses the covenant with David as "humanity's charter" and deals thoroughly with such emerging topics as the doctrine of the 'remnant' and covenant renewal. Finally, in his chapter on the New Covenant, consideration is given to topics such as the 'newness' of the new covenant.

All in all, then, here is a book to be warmly commended to the careful reader who reads with his Bible open before him and especially to the pastor who seeks help in exposition and interpretation of the Scriptures.

Norris Wilson