



NOVEMBER 1993

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL



REFORMED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE
FOUNDED 1854

Theological Seminary of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland
98 Lisburn Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland BT9 6AG

Vol. 9

NOVEMBER 1993

©Reformed Theological Journal

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Edited for the Faculty of the

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

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Editorial Address:

MSS., Books for Review, Correspondence and Subscriptions should be addressed to: Reformed Theological Journal, 98 Lisburn Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT9 6AG.

Subscriptions:

£3.50 plus postage U.K. 60 pence. U.S. \$8.00 post paid. In common with most periodicals, subscriptions run until cancelled.

ISSN 0268 - 4772

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ANNIVERSARIES - ARMCHAIRS OR SPRINGBOARDS?

1993 is a significant anniversary year for many churches in the reformed and presbyterian family. 150 years have passed since the Disruption, when approximately one third of the ministers and members withdrew for conscience' sake from the State Church to form the Free Church of Scotland.

200 years earlier, on 1st of July 1643, the Westminster Divines met for the first of the 1,163 sessions which would produce the Westminster Standards, foundation documents for all presbyterian churches. The Assembly is being commemorated throughout the world in various ways. Its Confession and Catechisms have been massively influential and many would echo the assessment of J.H. Thornwell: "I know of no uninspired production in any language or of any denomination that for richness of matter, clearness of statement, soundness of doctrine, Scriptural expression and edifying tendency can for a moment enter into competition with the Westminster Confession and Catechisms".

A lesser known anniversary is that of the Solemn League and Covenant, also signed in 1643. This agreement between England and Scotland, while of particular interest to Reformed Presbyterians, should be more widely recognised as having played a formative role in the development of the Westminster Assembly. That body had been summoned originally to discuss a limited agenda of church government and worship and to vindicate the 39 Articles of the Church of England. In the Solemn League and Covenant both parties bound themselves to seeking "uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of church government, directory for worship and catechising". The influence on the Assembly is obvious and it is not too much to claim that, without the Solemn League and Covenant, there would have been no Westminster Standards as we now have them.

While it is right to remember with thankfulness the Lord's past mercies, such looking backwards can be enervating. We can all too easily sink into the armchair of a pleasant wistfulness, congratulating ourselves on a glorious heritage and lamenting the evil times in which we find ourselves. But this is to misuse our history. Let us learn from and imitate the costly commitment to principle of Chalmers and his colleagues, the theological depth and pastoral simplicity of Westminster and the vision of nations united in loyalty to King Jesus which animated the Covenanters. The past will then serve as a springboard from which we leap into fresh endeavours with a renewed confidence in the unchanging Lord.

E.D.

THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY AND THE SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT

by **W.D.J. McKay**

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On 12th June, 1643, an Ordinance was issued by both Houses of the English Parliament

for the calling of an assembly of learned and godly divines, to be consulted with by the Parliament, for the settling of the government and liturgy of the Church of England, and for vindicating and clearing of the doctrine of the said Church from false aspersions and interpretations.

Thus began a process which resulted in the production of a series of documents which have exercised a profound influence on Reformed churches throughout the world during the last 350 years, albeit to a very limited extent in England itself.¹

The background to the Assembly

The problems which the Westminster Assembly of Divines was required to address were not of recent origin. Their roots lay in the unsatisfactory nature of the Elizabethan Settlement of the Church of England which gave substantial powers in religious matters to the secular government.

Although Elizabeth was determined to support the Protestant cause, not least because the Pope had declared her to be illegitimate and had commanded her to vacate the English throne, she was equally determined to maintain control over the Church of England. Thus in 1559 Parliament re-enacted Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy (1534) which established Elizabeth as "supreme governor" of the Church in both temporal and spiritual affairs.

A measure of reform had been accomplished in the Church, but those who wanted to move further in a biblical direction, for example in regard to vestments and ceremonies, quickly incurred the wrath of the monarch. A long-running struggle ensued between, on the one hand, the civil power and those Anglican leaders who were willing to accept the royal supremacy, and, on the other hand, the Puritan party, “the hotter sort of Protestant”, which sought thorough reform. Many of the Puritans were to suffer greatly for their stand for biblical principles.²

The advent of the Stuart dynasty after the death of Elizabeth brought no respite in the conflict, which increasingly became linked with the political tensions between King and Parliament.

Charles I, who succeeded to the throne in 1625, was determined to exert his authority in both civil and ecclesiastical spheres, a course which eventually plunged the country into civil war.

On the ecclesiastical front, Charles’ Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, vigorously promoted the High Church party, with its Arminian theology and love of man-made ceremonies, whilst ruthlessly acting against the Puritans who opposed these trends. The strength of opposition aroused by Laud’s policies may be gauged from the number of protests against the imposition of this Episcopalian system which were presented to Parliament, especially the Root and Branch Petition of 1640, which contained 15,000 signatures.

On the political front, Charles found Parliament so opposed to his absolutist claims that he tried for twelve years to rule without a parliament. In the end, however, his need to raise money to pay an indemnity to the Scottish Covenanters, who had resisted his policies with armed force, meant that in 1640 the king summoned what became known as the Long Parliament.

In both civil and ecclesiastical spheres, Parliament took strong action. Laud was impeached and imprisoned, and in time the Episcopalian system over which he had presided was swept away. A Remonstrance drawn up by the Commons setting out their grievances against the king was met by Charles’ abortive attempt to arrest five Members of the House on 4th January 1642. By August the Civil War was under way in earnest.³

The calling of the Assembly

The actions of the Long Parliament against Laudian Episcopacy meant that for a time England was effectively without a system of church government, with the result that functions such as the ordination of ministers could not be carried out.

To remedy this situation and to establish a satisfactory system to replace the one which it had abolished, Parliament summoned an assembly of ministers, together with members selected from both the Lords and Commons, which would settle the government of the Church of England and seek closer conformity with other Reformed churches, particularly with the Church of Scotland.

The Westminster Assembly was not in any sense a church court, but was rather a committee set up by Parliament to discuss issues remitted to it by Parliament with the aim of reporting its findings to Parliament. The stress on parliamentary involvement is deliberate: the civil authorities were determined to keep control of the affairs of the Church of England, a view generally known as Erastianism, after the Swiss theologian Thomas Erastus (1524-83). In this respect Parliament was as much the heir of Elizabeth I as was Charles I. No document drawn up by the Assembly had any official authority until, and unless, it was sanctioned by Parliament. The stage was set for conflict.

When the Assembly gathered for the first time on Saturday 1st July, 1643, out of 150 who were summoned by the Ordinance,⁴ 69 were present. The absence of over half of the desired number was due in large measure to the king's forbidding the Assembly to meet and threatening legal action against any who disobeyed. As a result many Episcopalian divines absented themselves. This lack of representation should be borne in mind when the reception of the Assembly's documents is considered.

The first task assigned to the Assembly by Parliament was the revision of the 39 Articles. By 12th October the 16th Article had been reached when a task of much greater and wider significance was provided as a result of the Solemn League and Covenant.

The Solemn League and Covenant

In the early days of the Civil War the Parliamentary forces suffered a number of serious reverses which brought their cause to a very low ebb. It was imperative that Scottish help be obtained against the King and his supporters and to this end Commissioners were sent north to negotiate a treaty. The result was the famous document known as the the Solemn League and Covenant,⁵ a treaty with both civil and religious terms, which was signed by both Lords and Commons in Westminster on 22nd September, 1643.

The Covenant was the result of tough negotiating by both sides. Although the English and the Scots had various political and spiritual concerns, the comment of Robert Baillie is significant: “the English were for a civill League, we for a religious Covenant”.⁶ The English needed a Scots army and were willing, some more than others, to accept a religious bond as the price of that help. The Scots had little to gain politically, but wanted to see the Church of England brought into closer conformity with the Presbyterian system of the Church of Scotland.

Among other things, the signatories of the Covenant swore “to preserve the rights and privileges of the Parliaments, and the liberties of the kingdoms; and to preserve and defend the King’s Majesty’s person and authority”. In the ecclesiastical sphere they undertook to preserve the Reformed faith of the Church of Scotland and to work for “the reformation of religion in the kingdoms of England and Ireland, in doctrine, worship, discipline and government, according to the word of God, and the example of the best reformed Churches.” In practice this would mean uniformity “in religion, confession of faith, form of church-government, directory for worship and catechising.”

Deep-seated tensions were present in this arrangement from the outset. The Scots believed that the Covenant committed the English to adopt the Presbyterian system to which they were committed by the National Covenant of 1638. Many of the English took a different view, some wanting, as Baillie put it,⁷ to keep a door open to Independency in England. One of the English Commissioners was Philip Nye, a thoroughly committed Independent and the preacher at the signing of the Covenant in Westminster.

Each side must have been aware of the different outlook of the other. The English knew the Scots were thoroughly Presbyterian and would accept no other system. The Scots clearly were aware of the diversity among the English and, according to Baillie, “Mr [Alexander] Henderson’s hopes are not great of their conformitie to us, before our armie be in England.”⁸ With the benefit of hindsight, such a comment is deeply significant.

To further the aims of the Solemn League and Covenant a number of Scottish Commissioners were sent to London to treat with the Grand Committee which was made up of members from both Houses of Parliament and from the Assembly of Divines. The Scots also agreed to sit as non-voting Commissioners in the Assembly itself. The ruling elders, such as Sir Archibald Johnston of Warriston, played little part in the Assembly, but the ministers, such as Samuel Rutherford, George Gillespie and Alexander Henderson, spoke often and exercised considerable influence in Assembly debates.⁹

By October 1643, the Scottish Commissioners were all present and on Parliament’s instructions the Assembly left aside the 39 Articles and turned to the four areas of ecclesiastical life outlined in the Covenant: Confession of Faith, Form of Church Government, Directory for Worship and Catechising.

The parties in the Assembly

The members of the Westminster Assembly were by no means united in their views of ecclesiology, and a brief survey of the different parties to be found among them will explain why its debates developed as they did.¹⁰

A small group, distinguished not by their view of church government but rather by their view of Church-State relations, can be termed the Erastians. In their opinion the Church did not have a jurisdiction separate from that of the State which exercised authority in church affairs directly by means of the civil magistrates. To this party belonged Rev Thomas Coleman and the MP and rabbinic scholar John Selden. Although small in numbers, they reflected the views of a significant proportion of both Houses of Parliament which had to endorse the Assembly documents.

Supporting a Congregational form of church government was a small number of Independents, including the famous theologian Thomas Goodwin and others of considerable piety. The Independent ministers were known as the “Five Dissenting Brethren”, small in numbers but very important in that their views were shared by Oliver Cromwell, the rising star of the Parliamentary cause who would eventually hold supreme power in England.

The majority in the Assembly may be designated “Presbyterians”, although within this group there was great diversity of opinion. Older writers tend to portray all in this group as being in complete harmony with Scots Presbyterian views, but that is a simplistic picture. A group of English ministers, including Stephen Marshall and Edmund Calamy, were committed to a thoroughgoing Presbyterianism such as that held by the Scots, and the Presbyterian cause appears to have been strongest in the City of London. Others were much less committed to this position. Some knew little of Presbyterianism in practice. Some were suspicious of ideas emanating from Geneva or Scotland. Many had serious reservations about giving ecclesiastical power to “ruling elders” and would not accept the Scottish model. Many were willing to accept Presbyterianism on pragmatic grounds but not, as the Scots insisted, “by Divine Right”. Among the latter were Erastians such as Coleman and Selden.

Although Episcopalians absented themselves in obedience to the King’s order, some in the Assembly would have settled for a kind of “primitive Episcopacy” shorn of Laud’s High Church pretensions and leaving no room for ruling elders, but such a position had no significant influence on the outcome of the Assembly’s debates.

This great diversity made for prolonged debate and slow progress, but as the months passed an overwhelming majority opted for a broadly Presbyterian settlement for the Church of England.

The Assembly’s mode of working

In order to deal with its business, it was the practice of the Assembly to meet from nine in the morning until one or two in the afternoon in plenary session. Although some suggested that fewer meetings would allow for deeper study, it was decided to meet on five mornings and one or two afternoons each week.

To provide the Assembly with the material for its debates the entire membership was divided into three General Committees which drafted propositions to be presented in due course to the whole Assembly. This system proved to be very cumbersome since, during the discussion of church government all three committees were given the same assignments and so three different sets of propositions were drafted on each subject. It was not until the drafting of the *Confession of Faith* that this system was streamlined.

Since no limits were set on the length of speeches in the Assembly, its work progressed at a painfully slow rate. Despite messages urging haste which were sent from time to time from Parliament and from the Scottish General Assembly, there was little improvement. Minority groups such as the Independents took full advantage of this unlimited freedom of speech. Progress was not helped by the fact that several different issues could be under consideration at the same time, with the result that the Assembly's efforts were not concentrated on resolving one question before moving on to the next. The diversity of opinion within the Assembly's membership also hindered progress. The Presbyterian/Independent controversy is the outstanding example, but at an early stage three whole days of debate were spent deciding whether the reading of Scripture without a subsequent exposition could be considered an element of worship.

Absenteeism proved to be a continual problem in spite of variations in the times of Assembly meetings. It was a small body from the outset. In the fifty votes for which numbers are recorded, the highest number voting is fifty-three, in all but twelve cases less than forty voted, and the average is thirty-four.¹¹ The number of abstentions is not known. Once the main work of the Assembly was concluded there were periods when no sittings could be held for lack of a quorum.

Church Government and Ordination

At the direction of Parliament, the Assembly began by considering matters of church government, including ordination, since the Church of England had been left without any recognised polity after the abolition of Laudian Episcopacy, and there was a dearth of ministers, especially to serve as chaplains in the Parliamentary army. Two issues relating to church

government were of particular concern, namely Independency and Erastianism.

The Independents, as has been noted previously, were a small but significant and very vocal minority in the Assembly. As their name indicates, they believed that each local congregation was an independent body, having the full authority necessary to govern all its affairs vested in the congregation. They recognised the value of consultation with other congregations but were unwilling to grant such bodies more than advisory status.

The Assembly proved to be very generous to the Independents and allowed them three weeks in which to present their case. In the end, however, all their propositions were voted down. Both sides appealed to Scripture to support their arguments, both claiming that their form of church government reflected New Testament practice, but in the heat of debate texts were often stretched to prove positions which had already been adopted on other grounds. Both sides found the New Testament Church to be remarkably like their own.

Eventually a Presbyterian system was adopted by the Assembly, a system of government by ministers and elders operating in a series of “courts” of increasing authority. A measure of diversity remained in that the Scots argued strongly for the divine ordinance of ruling elders who were also regarded as “presbyters”, whilst the Assembly as a whole was unwilling to go beyond allowing “other church governors” alongside ministers. The status of ruling elders has continued to vex Presbyterian theorists,¹² but the Assembly’s formulations reflect the main outlines of all Presbyterian systems.

The Assembly’s *Directory for Ordination* was sent to Parliament on 20th April, 1644, and later in the year a document entitled *Propositions concerning Church Government* was also submitted. The latter represented a collection of Assembly decisions which were “methodised” by a committee. The final product sets side by side propositions which were approved in entirely different contexts and at times its statements do not make sense. Its fundamental principles, however, are sufficiently clear.

After pressing for greater haste in the production of a form of church government, the Parliament, once it had these documents, lost all sense of

urgency. The documents, in fact, provoked considerable opposition since many in Parliament held the Erastian view that the Church derived its authority from the State. Parliament was willing to endorse a Presbyterian system, but not as being by “Divine Right”, and it could not stomach the Assembly’s assertion of the Church’s independent spiritual jurisdiction, especially in matters of discipline relating to the Lord’s Supper. Much of the substance of the Assembly’s advice was endorsed, but in greatly abbreviated form and with all reference to scriptural authority removed. Temporary arrangements for ordination were made, but the *Form of Presbyterian Church-government*, including both the Assembly’s documents, was not ratified in full and in effect disappeared from the English scene. The Church of Scotland did ratify the *Form* but the Scottish Parliament did not. Its influence has thus tended to be unofficial and indirect.

The more considered views of the Assembly are contained in their *Directory for Church Government*, but political changes in England and Scotland meant that it was not accepted in either country.

Public Worship

To replace the *Book of Common Prayer* the Assembly drafted *A Directory for the Public Worship of God* which provided full directions for the conduct of each part of worship. In addition to extensive consideration of preaching and the administration of the sacraments, directions are also provided for the sanctification of the Lord’s Day, the solemnisation of marriage, visitation of the sick, public fasting and the singing of psalms (“the voice is to be tunably and gravely ordered”). Lengthy prayers for use before and after the sermon are provided - not to be read slavishly, but as examples.

The Scots had set aside their plans to produce a directory of worship so that they could consider the production of the Assembly. The *Directory* represents a compromise between Scottish and Puritan patterns of worship, and the Scots adopted it with reservation.¹³ They insisted, for example, on their practice at the Lord’s Supper of the communicants sitting at the Table and serving one another with the bread and wine, contrary to the Puritan custom of the minister serving the elements.

In general the Scots were successful in having their practice in the sacramental services adopted. Thus private baptism, allowed by the Puritans, was excluded from the *Directory*. On the other hand, they failed to gain endorsement for the practice of a “Reader” taking a substantial part of a service, whilst the minister might enter the church building only when he went into the pulpit to preach. The *Directory* put the whole service in the minister’s hands.

The instructions regarding psalm-singing were matched by the Assembly’s approval of a psalter - a thoroughly revised edition of the version by Francis Rous. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland revised this psalter still further and approved it for use in 1649. It was approved by the Scottish Parliament and published in 1650.

Doctrinal documents

An essential element in the projected uniformity of religion in the three kingdoms was a common confession of faith and catechism, and it is for these documents that the Westminster Assembly is most often remembered and through which it has exerted its greatest influence.

The work on the Confession of Faith progressed comparatively quickly,¹⁴ although comments in some of Robert Baillie’s letters show a degree of frustration that progress could still be painfully slow at times. Having learned from the inefficiency of assigning the same topics to all three committees during its debates on church government, the Assembly gave different areas of doctrine to each committee and their subsequent reports were thoroughly debated. With issues of ecclesiology largely set aside, there was considerable unity on all the topics included in the *Confession*, although to the very end there were members who recorded dissent from particular decisions.

The Westminster Divines enjoyed the great advantage of standing at the end of a very significant period of creed-making. In Reformation and post-Reformation days many Reformed confessions were drawn up and the divines were able to draw on the best of these, particularly on the Irish Articles (1615) attributed to Archbishop Ussher of Armagh. In places the wording of the *Westminster Confession* mirrors that of the *Irish Articles*.

Some of the best theological minds of the day devoted their attention to framing the *Confession* and the result is a document of outstanding precision which gave definitive form to what is known as Federal (or Covenant) Theology. Twice the whole document was discussed by the entire Assembly and, at the insistence of Parliament, proof-texts were added.

The *Confession* suffered very different fates in Scotland and England. When completed, it was taken, without proof-texts, to Scotland and was approved by the General Assembly, with minor reservations, in 1647, and ratified by the Estates in February, 1649. The English Parliament, however, was very reluctant to approve the *Confession*, particularly the parts which asserted the Church's independent jurisdiction. Eventually an edited version, more to Parliament's taste, was approved in 1650, but it played little part in subsequent history. It is the version approved by the Church of Scotland which has become the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and which has exercised a determinative influence in Reformed Churches which trace their origins to Scotland. Even Independents (in 1648) and Baptists (in 1677) adopted versions of the *Confession* which preserved its basic Calvinistic theology whilst accommodating their distinctive emphases.

Although one catechism had been envisaged, it became evident to the Assembly that they could not, as the Scots expressed it, "dress up milk and meat both in one dish". The result was the production of a comprehensive summary of doctrine (*Larger Catechism*) and a concise version for "such as are of weaker capacity" (*the Shorter Catechism*). The *Shorter Catechism* was approved by Parliament in September 1648, but the *Larger Catechism* was passed by the Commons alone. Both were duly approved by the General Assembly and the Estates in Scotland.

Of the two, the *Shorter Catechism* has exercised by far the greater influence, and for centuries shaped the minds of Reformed people young and old. Its avoidance of issues of church government made it all the more widely acceptable. As with the *Confession*, the influence of the *Catechisms* was perhaps most limited in their country of origin and it was chiefly through Scotland that their effects were felt.

With the completion of the doctrinal documents, the Scottish Commissioners one by one returned home, and the future of the Assembly was bound up with political developments in England.

The end of the Assembly¹⁵

By the end of 1647 the Assembly had served its main purpose and became little more than an advisory committee for Parliament. Old controversies with the Erastians and the Independents were considered once again, and the Assembly prepared its answers to the objections of the Dissenting Brethren against the Presbyterian form of church government. It had no power, however, to implement the system set out in the *Form of Presbyterian Church-government*. Those who had the power had more urgent issues in hand.

Of great significance for both the Assembly and the Parliament was the rise to power of Oliver Cromwell as a result of a series of victories in the Civil War. Cromwell was an Independent who had no sympathy for Presbyterianism and who sought toleration for the multiplicity of sects flourishing in England. Power increasingly passed from Parliament, with its Presbyterian majority, to the army, with its Independent sympathies, which held the king captive. In December 1648, over forty Presbyterian MPs were imprisoned and many more were excluded from Parliament (“Pride’s Purge”) leaving what became known as the Rump Parliament. After the execution of Charles I in 1649 and the defeat of the Scots who supported his son, later to be Charles II, Cromwell dispensed with the services of Parliament entirely and so in 1653 the history of the Westminster Assembly came to an end.

The documents produced by the Assembly, however, have ensured that its name has lived on. The *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* provide an unrivalled statement of Calvinistic orthodoxy which shaped theological thinking in many parts of the world and which, in spite of many efforts, has yet to be bettered. The other documents, though often neglected, still have much to teach the contemporary Church. Although composed of fallible men, with their share of weaknesses and shortcomings, the Assembly has proved to be a source of blessing far exceeding the imagination of those who called it into being.

The failure of the Covenant

The hopes of uniformity entertained by the Scots when the Solemn League and Covenant was signed were not to be realised. All the necessary

ecclesiastical framework was to hand in the *Confession of Faith* and the other documents produced by the Westminster Assembly, but in England the political will and power to establish uniformity were lacking. Eventually at the Restoration in 1660 the Covenant was explicitly rejected by Charles II, and in the Williamite Revolution Settlement it was completely ignored.

Despite the scope and grandeur of its vision, two significant weaknesses are evident in the Solemn League and Covenant.

First, it is clear that the Covenant tried to combine a religious and a political commitment: it was both a covenant and treaty. Consonant with biblical covenants, there is a spiritual commitment to God, an undertaking to “live in faith and love”. This implies a living spiritual experience which cannot be coerced. On the other hand there is a commitment to engage in various political actions “to preserve the rights and privileges of the Parliaments, and the liberties of the kingdoms”. Thus the Scottish Parliament sought to enforce the swearing of the Covenant, on pain of civil punishment, as a test of loyalty and fitness to hold office. This fundamental tension between a free heart-response to God’s grace and a binding political treaty led a later Covenanter, Alexander Shields, to conclude that two separate covenants, one religious and one political, would have been preferable.¹⁶

In the second place, as has already been indicated, the Scots and the English entered the Covenant with different aims and consequently interpreted it in different ways. In the Scottish view, the Covenant committed the signatories to establish a single Reformed, Covenanted, Presbyterian Church, apart from which no public expression of Christianity would be legal. As time went on, however, it became clear that a degree of toleration of religious views would be permitted in England which was totally unacceptable to the Scots. The resulting recriminations were bitter, with Samuel Rutherford stigmatising the English Independents as worse than pagans, having sworn the Covenant “in a Jesuiticall reserved sense”.¹⁷ The unfaithfulness of one party, the Covenanters believed, could not lessen the obligation of the Covenant.

Although for the majority the Solemn League and Covenant was relegated to the museum of historical curiosities, its vision lived on in the hearts of the descendants of the Scottish Covenanters who have never given up hope that it might one day be realised by the power and grace of God.

References

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2. See the summary of the reign of Elizabeth I in Hetherington, op. cit., pp31-61.
3. For an outline of events see eg John Kenyon, *The Civil Wars of England* (London, 1988).
4. The list of all those summoned will be found in Mitchell and Struthers, *Minutes*, pp lxxi-lxxiv.
5. The text is generally bound with the *Confession of Faith* and other documents of the Westminster Assembly.
6. Robert Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, (Edinburgh, 1841-2), 2:90.
7. *ibid.*
8. Baillie, op. cit., 2:104.
9. Useful biographical notes on some of the Scottish Commissioners are provided in Hetherington *History* pp388-405.
10. A comprehensive survey of the parties in the Assembly will be found in R.S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord* (Edinburgh, 1985), chap 4.
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12. A useful survey of the debate is: Iain Murray, "Ruling Elders - A Sketch of a Controversy" in *Banner of Truth*, April 1983.
13. This is well dealt with in B.B. Warfield, op. cit., pp44-53.
14. The subject is considered in detail by Warfield in "The Making of the Westminster Confession, and Especially of its Chapter on the Decree of God", op. cit., pp75-151.
15. For greater detail see Hetherington, op. cit., pp304ff.
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17. Samuel Rutherford, *A Free Disputation against pretended Liberty of Conscience*, (London, 1649), xxi, p262.

THE SCOTTISH DISRUPTION OF 1843

by Hugh M. Cartwright

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On Thursday 18th May 1843, instead of constituting the General Assembly of the Established Church of Scotland in St Andrew's Church, Edinburgh, the retiring moderator, Dr David Welsh, in the presence of the Royal Commissioner, read a Protest against what was to the subscribers a new requirement imposed by the State as a condition of Establishment - readiness to submit the spiritual functions of the Church to the jurisdiction of civil courts: "we are now constrained to acknowledge it to be the mind and will of the State, as recently declared, that such submission should and does form a condition of the Establishment, and of the possession of the benefits thereof; and... as we cannot, without committing what we believe to be sin, in opposition to God's law, in disregard of the honour and authority of Christ's crown, and in violation of our own solemn vows, comply with this condition, we cannot in conscience continue connected with it, and retain the benefits of an Establishment to which such condition is attached".¹ Welsh led the Assembly Commissioners adhering to this Protest to the Tanfield Hall, Canonmills, and constituted the first General Assembly of the Church of Scotland Free, Thomas Chalmers being elected Moderator.

126 ministers and 77 elders commissioned to the Established Church Assembly (about half the total) sat in the first Free Church Assembly. It was agreed, on account of the momentous issues to be discussed, to co-opt all ministers who adhered to the Protest and an adhering elder from each kirk session not otherwise represented in the Assembly. On 23rd May 386 ministers signed an Act of Separation and Deed of Demission renouncing the status and material rights derived from Establishment. 84 ministers not then present subsequently signed a Supplementary Act and Deed. 38% of the parish ministers of Scotland (64% of those who had made some profession of evangelical or non-intrusion principles) adhered to the Free Church, along with some Chapel of Ease ministers, assistants and ordained home missionaries who had no seat in Church Courts, the entire body of ordained foreign and Jewish missionaries, and 192 probationers.² It is estimated that about half the membership of the Church of Scotland adhered to the Free Church.

Historical Background

What occasioned this momentous event which leading Evangelicals sought to avoid? From the time of the Reformation the Church of Scotland advocated two principles: (i) the right of Christ to reign in His Church, or the necessity that the Church should be free to regulate her belief and practice by His Word [the Regulative Principle]; and (ii) a friendly relationship between the divinely appointed “co-ordinate jurisdictions” of Church and State in seeking to further the Reformed religion and Christian society to which both were committed [the Establishment Principle]. These principles were incorporated in Acts of Parliament, as well as in Ecclesiastical Standards but attempts to implement them brought Church and State into frequent conflict in the 16th and 17th Centuries and divided the Church in the 18th Century.

The 1851 Act and Declaration Anent the Publication of the Subordinate Standards of the Free Church of Scotland admits that “the Revolution Settlement failed in adequately acknowledging the Lord’s work done formerly in the land; and it was, besides, in several matters of practical legislation, very generally considered by our fathers at the time to be defective and unsatisfactory. Some, and these not the least worthy, went even so far as to refuse all submission to it. But for the most part, our fathers, smarting from the fresh wounds of anti-Christian oppression, weary of strife, and anxious for rest and peace, either thankfully accepted, or at least acquiesced in it; in the hope of being able practically to effect under it the great ends which the Church had all along, in all her former contendings, regarded as indispensable”.³ The 1851 Act suggests that the Revolution Settlement did not obtain a full and fair trial on account of the too easy admission of ministers (“the Prelatic curates”) not firmly attached to the Church’s Confession, the spiritual and doctrinal declension which affected the early 18th Century Scottish Church in common with other Reformed Churches, and the reintroduction of Patronage in 1712 by Queen Anne’s U.K. Government.

The relationship between Church and State became strained in the 1830s and 40s because of the revived and better organised state of Evangelical Religion in the Church and increasing interference by civil courts in Church matters. The battle lines were drawn in 1834 when the General Assembly with its Evangelical majority passed Acts giving limited rights to Congregations to veto the appointment of unwanted ministers and

granting pastors of Church Extension or *Quoad Sacra* parishes membership of Church Courts. Patronage - the right which went with certain titles, civil offices or properties, or might be bought, to nominate a parish minister - occasioned Secessions from the generally compliant Church of the 18th Century. It occasioned the Disruption in that, when patrons or presentees went to court to complain against evangelically dominated presbyteries which refused to intrude unwanted ministers, courts were increasingly ready to issue judgments which went beyond determining temporalities and usurped ecclesiastical functions. Lethendy, Stewarton, Marnoch, Daviot, Auchterarder, Strathbogie are names identifying court cases well known from readily available accounts of the pre-Disruption period. The Claim, Declaration and Protest anent the Encroachments of the Court of Session, adopted by the 1842 General Assembly, specifies instances where, contrary to the judgment of Church courts, civil courts forbade or commanded presbyteries to admit men to pastoral charges, refused communicants the right to dissent from calls, prevented the provision of additional ministers and kirk sessions in church extension situations as they did not want more Evangelicals in Church courts, prohibited ministers from preaching or administering sacraments throughout a whole presbytery whose moderate ministers had been deposed, threatened officebearers with imprisonment and held them liable to damages for obeying the directions of church rather than civil courts, attempted to reverse church censures in disciplinary cases, and assumed the right to determine the validity of commissions to the Assembly.⁴

Had all the parish ministers professing non-intrusion principles (an estimated 714 out of 1195) held together the State might have been persuaded to reach an agreement recognising the Church's freedom to exercise her spiritual functions while preserving her special relationship with the State. A compromising Middle Party conveyed the impression of Evangelical readiness to capitulate and so encouraged the authorities to reject the Church's appeals. It was Hugh Miller's view that "at the doors of these unfortunate men lies the ruin of the Scottish Establishment" (The Witness, May 1843).

Strenuous efforts were made by the Church to avert the Disruption. In addition to the May 1842 Claim (the apologia for the Free Church of Scotland), accompanying addresses to the Queen and many private conferences and letters, a memorial was transmitted to the Government by the November 1842 Commission of Assembly, representations were made by

a Convocation of about 470 ministers in November 1842, a lengthy communication was forwarded to the Home Secretary by a Special Commission of Assembly on 12 January 1843 in response to his rejection of the Claim, and a petition was addressed to Parliament by the Commission of Assembly on 31st January 1843. When all efforts failed and it became clear that the State endorsed the actions of her courts the leadership of the Church resolved “that, in these circumstances, a free Assembly of the Church of Scotland, by law established, cannot at this time be holden, and that an Assembly, in accordance with the fundamental principles of the Church, cannot be constituted in connection with the State without violating the conditions which must now, since the rejection by the Legislature of the Church’s Claim of Right, be held to be the condition of the Establishment”.⁵

The Disruption Fathers held that from May 1843 the Church of Scotland, judged by adherence to Constitutional Standards, was identified with the Free Church, whereas by adopting Acts conceding the right of the State to determine the limits of the jurisdiction of the Church and submitting to decisions of civil courts in spiritual matters, the Established Church departed in a fundamental principle from the Constitution of the Church of Scotland and became a new Church. The emergence of two churches was attributable to those not adhering to the Church’s Constitution.

Basic Principle

In a movement with widespread popular support it was inevitable that personal, social and political considerations and local circumstances influenced some to favour the Disruption. But the deepest motivation of the Disruption was found in the revival of religious principle. The resurgence of Evangelicalism in the pulpit, the spiritual influence of evangelical schoolmasters and catechists, and the coincidence of fairly extensive religious revival with growing conflict between Church and State, led many to examine the issues in the light of Scripture and conclude that what was at stake was Christ’s right to rule His Church.

The spiritual independence sought was freedom to act in accordance with what the 1842 Claim describes as “an essential doctrine of this Church, and a fundamental principle in its constitution, as set forth in the Confession of Faith thereof, in accordance with the Word and law of the most holy God, that ‘there is no other Head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ’ (xxv. 6);

and that... 'The Lord Jesus Christ, as King and head of His Church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of Church officers distinct from the civil magistrate' (xxx. 1); which government is ministerial, not lordly, and to be exercised in consonance with the laws of Christ, and with the liberties of his people".⁶

Spiritual independence was not equated with freedom from the judgment of civil authorities in civil matters affecting the Church. Obedience to the civil magistrate acting within his sphere was inculcated by the Disruption leaders and documents. They advocated submission to civil penalties which ecclesiastical actions might involve, even loss of stipend when patrons refused to accept the rejection of presentees.

Spiritual independence was not equated with separation of Church and State. Dr Chalmers represented the accepted position in words from the Moderator's Chair in 1843: "We hold that every part and every function of a commonwealth should be leavened with Christianity, and that every functionary, from the highest to the lowest, should, in their respective spheres, do all that lies in them to countenance and uphold it. That is to say, though we quit the Establishment, we go out on the Establishment Principle - we quit a vitiated Establishment, but would rejoice in returning to a pure one. To express it otherwise, we are the advocates of a national recognition and a national support of religion, and we are not Voluntaries".⁷

Neither was spiritual independence equated with the right of Assembly majorities to abandon formerly avowed Biblical Doctrine, Worship, Discipline or Government. The common current idea that the spiritual independence secured by the Disruption found logical outcome in later 19th Century loosening of Free Church commitment to the Establishment Principle, to the doctrine of particular atonement, to the Calvinism of the Westminster Confession, to strict Creed subscription, to Biblical inerrancy and infallibility and to materials and modes of worship for which there is Scriptural authority, and that it reached its climax in the Declaratory Acts and Articles underlying the Unions of 1900 and 1929 which gave the resulting Churches almost unlimited freedom to interpret even the few doctrines regarded as non-negotiable, is unhistorical. The nature of the Disruption Church's commitment to the Constitution of the Reformed Church of Scotland is attested in the Questions and Formula prescribed for officebearers⁸ and illustrated in the documents and public statements of the time. In the Questions "the spirituality and freedom of the Church of Christ"

is secured and conditioned by “her subjection to Him as her only head and to His Word as her only rule” and is consistent with the most precise commitment to unqualified belief in the authority and finality of Scripture, and with sincere personal owning of the Biblical character of “the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith”, the Presbyterian government and discipline of the Church, and “the purity of worship presently authorised and practised in this Church”.

The spiritual independence asserted by the Disruption Church was freedom to acknowledge the crown rights of the Redeemer, to be regulated by the revealed will of Christ. The union of Christ with His people according to the terms of the Covenant of redemption was such that He was Head of the body which consisted of elect, redeemed, regenerate sinners. But He was also Head of the Church as it appeared in the world, an institution consisting of “all these throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children” (Westminster Confession XXV ii).

The concise exposition given by two distinguished Disruption ministers of their understanding of the meaning of Christ’s Headship over the visible Church may be noted. James Bannerman⁹ writes: “The Church, as a society, owes its origin to Christ; it derives from Him its government and office-bearers; it receives from Him its laws and constitution; it draws from Him its spiritual influence and grace; it accepts at His hand its ordinances and institutions; it acts in His name, and is guided in its proceedings by His authority. In the expression that the Lord Jesus Christ is head of the Church, and in the fact that He is the only source of Church power, there is much more implied than that He is the founder of the Christian society. He is both its founder and administrator, being the ever present source of life and influence, of ordinance and blessing, of law and authority, of word and doctrine within the community. Through His Spirit, and His Word, and His ordinances, alike of government and grace, Christ both originates and administers His Church upon earth”. William Cunningham¹⁰ identifies the specific significance of the Disruption Church’s appeal to the Headship of Christ: “We have not brought forward the doctrine of Christ’s headship as furnishing directly and immediately the proper ground or reason of anything we have done ourselves, or called upon others to do. We admit that the only inference directly and immediately deducible from the doctrine of Christ’s sole headship is that every intimation which He has given of His will as to the constitution and government of His Church, and the manner in which the administration of its affairs should be conducted, ought to be implicitly

obeyed. We admit, farther, that this general inference does not, directly and of itself, afford a full vindication of the proceedings which led to the Disruption; and that with that view, it is needful, in addition, to establish from Scripture the doctrines of the exclusive supremacy of the Bible, and the exclusive jurisdiction of ecclesiastical office-bearers, as involved in or flowing from the doctrine of Christ's sole headship".

Impressed with the glory of the Person issuing the Church's commission, Matthew 28. 18-20, the Disruption fathers were concerned for the fulfilment of each part of it: teaching or discipling all the nations; incorporating professed disciples by baptism in the visible Church; and, what is often overlooked, teaching the Church to be regulated in every aspect of her life by the will of her Lord revealed in His Word.

Subsequent Development

Those requisitioning the Convocation of ministers which met in Edinburgh between 17th and 18th November 1842 held "the supreme jurisdiction of the Church in things spiritual to be indispensable to the maintenance of a pure gospel in the Land" and expected the Convocation to determine on action to secure this which was "right and best for the Christian good of the families of Scotland".¹¹ The maintenance of sound doctrine and practice in relation to Christ's Headship was sought not only for God's glory but also for the practical accomplishment of the great commission and the good of sinners. The early Disruption Church was honoured of the Lord to accomplish much for the Christian good of Scotland and of other lands in the preservation and extension of gospel preaching and in the areas of theological training, missionary endeavour, education and social welfare.

However, the doctrinal and practical retrogression of the later Free Church, somewhat masked for a time by ongoing enthusiasm for the schemes set in motion by the Disruption spirit, illustrates the necessity of knowing and adhering to first principles. True spiritual independence, secured by assertion of the sole Headship of Christ against the claims of popes, kings, prelates and civil courts, was lost when separated from its definitive connection with the absolute supremacy of Christ in His inerrant and infallible Word and reinterpreted as the right of Assembly majorities, with minimal restrictions, to determine the beliefs and practices of the Church. Increasingly, Church policy was determined not by regard to the

revealed will of her Lord but by considerations derived from rationalistic criticism, worldly concepts of evangelistic relevance and variously motivated moves for church union. The outcome was the abandonment in 1900 of the unqualified commitment to Scripture and the Westminster Confession of Faith which had characterised the Disruption Church.

Permanent Relevance

While the particular situation which occasioned the Disruption no longer exists, and practical assertion of the Headship of Christ within the Church against State interference may not at present in our land require sacrifice, the fundamental principle of the Disruption is still relevant. The Church is required to zealously seek to implement every intimation of her Lord's will in creed, worship, discipline, government and personal living, and to resist every encroachment upon her spiritual independence whether from pope, prelate, civil authority, or groups within her own borders.

The application of this principle safeguards the liberty of individual members and officebearers of the Church and precludes licence; preserves the doctrinal, liturgical, governmental and moral purity of the Church; and provides the only sound basis for ecclesiastical union.

There is no real liberty in Churches which lack a definite constitution which posits divine authority as the sanction for required beliefs and practices and makes Scripture the final court of appeal in disputes.

Where spiritual independence is not defined as freedom to be subject to divine authority the Church will not only depart from Biblical norms in the realm of polity and practice but will also depart from Reformed and Evangelical doctrine. The Church which does not maintain the sole headship of Christ and so the absolute supremacy of Scripture, will also lose its testimony to the uniqueness of Christ as prophet and priest.

The Disruption Fathers, like the Westminster Divines, the 200th anniversary of whose convening they celebrated in 1843, regarded the application of this principle as providing the basis for the reunion of divided Scottish Presbyterianism. They would not unite with those who made open questions of matters on which they believed the Church had confessed Scripture truth.

The origin of the Disruption Church testifies to the power of Biblical principle and its inconsistent subsequent development testifies to the danger of either misinterpreting or failing to universally apply that principle.

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2. cf. James M'Cosh, *The Wheat and the Chaff gathered into Bundles* (Perth 1843).
3. *The Subordinate Standards*, p. xii.
4. *The Subordinate Standards*, pp 235 - 255.
5. Protest, 1843, *The Subordinate Standards*, p. 259.
6. *The Subordinate Standards*, pp. 235, 236.
7. *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, held at Edinburgh, May 1843* (Edinburgh 1853), p. 20.
8. *The Practice of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh 1964), pp. 121 - 126.
9. *The Church of Christ* (Edinburgh 1868), Volume I, p. 194.
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a) from within the FCS:

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b) from outwith the FCS:

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SPIRITUAL WARFARE - WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CHRISTIAN LEADERS

Strengths and Weaknesses Illustrated from Kings of Judah

by Hugh J. Blair

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Benhadad, king of Syria, showed himself to be a shrewd army commander when in the war between Syria and Israel he gave instructions to his captains, "Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel" (I Kings 22:31, New King James Version). Attack the leader and victory will be assured! So often that seems to be the strategy of the great enemy of souls: Christian leaders are a special target for Satan. If we are to anticipate such attacks and to stand against them, we would be wise to look at examples of leaders who were targets for evil forces. Such examples may be found among the later kings of Judah whose reigns are recorded in II Chronicles. They provide us not only with examples of leaders who were engaged with enemies in warfare, but also, sadly, with examples of men who faltered in their spiritual commitment.

Often in the literature of their time the kings are referred to as shepherds, called to be pastors of their people. H.L. Ellison suggests that the metaphor 'shepherd' is "peculiarly suited to stress the royal duty of enforcing social righteousness," and is severe in his assessment of what the kings had achieved in that area: "It is by examining the social record of the better kings that we can best see how little the monarchy had provided true shepherds for God's people."¹ But we must go beyond the area of social righteousness to assess the successes and failures of the kings; they had an influence in the area of religion as well. Because of that they have a message for the pastors of God's people today: we can learn from their strengths and their weaknesses.

There was a famous statesman once who refused to let his biography be written in his lifetime, "for," he said, "I have seen too many fall out in the last lap." There is a solemn warning in II Chronicles in the fact that so many of the good kings of Judah faltered in the latter part of their reigns.

Asa: Faith and Failure

In Asa we find faith and failure, as recorded in II Chronicles 14-16. In the first part of his story (in II Chronicles 14) Asa gives a wonderful example of faith. Confronted with the vast army of Zerah the Ethiopian, Asa put his trust in the Lord. He prayed, "Lord it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against the multitude." (14:11). Moved by the Spirit of God, Azariah brought God's assurance to Asa and all Judah, "The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you."

Faith for Asa meant resting in the Lord; it meant seeking the Lord, in the sense of looking to Him alone for the help that was needed; it meant going forward with the Lord, to face what had to be faced and to do what had to be done. It included separation from sin, including sin in his own family. "He took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah..." (15:8). He removed his mother (or grandmother) from being queen, "because she had made an idol in a grove..." (15:16). His faith, and the implications of it, brought people flocking to the standard of his faith, not only from Judah and Benjamin, but also from Israel as well, "for they saw that the Lord his God was with him" (15:9). Victory in our spiritual warfare begins where it began for Asa, in utter reliance on the Lord.

Tragically, in Asa's case faith turned to failure. Where there had been reliance on the Lord alone, Asa late on in his reign entered into an alliance with Benhadad king of Syria, paid for by silver and gold taken from the treasuries of the house of the Lord, and secured his help against Baasha, king of Israel (16:1ff). He trusted the world for help rather than the Lord. Hanani the seer, as God's spokesman reminded him of the wonderful victory that had been gained when he relied in the Lord alone, and rebuked him for his folly in putting his trust in the king of Syria instead of in the Lord his God. Hanani enunciated a principle which goes beyond the case of Asa: "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect" - fully committed - "toward him." There is God's message still for those who are engaged in spiritual warfare.

Parallel to Asa's failure in faith on the national level there was his failure in faith on the personal level, when in his illness "he sought not to the Lord,

but to the physicians” (16:12), probably pagan practitioners. There the pattern of substituting reliance on the world for reliance on the Lord alone is repeated.

Let us be reminded by Asa, then, that “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds” (I Cor. 10:4).

Jehoshaphat: Commitment and Compromise

Jehoshaphat achieved outstanding success in his battles, but needed correction for weaknesses that showed themselves in his life. At the heart of his success was his commitment to the Lord; at the heart of his weakness was compromise that involved being unequally yoked with unbelievers.

II Chronicles 17 is full of praise for all that Jehoshaphat did, and running through it all is his commitment to the Lord. The details of that commitment are especially significant for spiritual warfare.

(a) “The Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the former ways of his father David; he did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father, and walked in his commandments...” (17:3,4, NKJV). Jehoshaphat put his trust nowhere else but in the Lord, and followed that through by a life of obedience to His commands. Equipment for spiritual warfare begins there.

(b) “His heart took delight in the ways of the Lord” (17:6, NKJV). Another possible translation is, “He was elated in the ways of the Lord.” A practical illustration of that comes out later in the greatest of his battles, in chapter 20. His army was going out to meet the vastly superior forces of the Moabites and the Ammonites; and he gave commands to the Levites, who led the praise, to go before the army and to sing praises to the Lord: “Praise the Lord, for His mercy endureth for ever.” (v.21) We could understand the army going out with grim determination to meet the enemy, but here was glad elation and praise. That kind of spirit in spiritual warfare is devastating to the enemy.

(c) The commitment of Jehoshaphat to the ways of the Lord involved

setting up an educational programme by which the priests and the Levites went through all the cities of Judah and taught the people the law of the Lord (17:9). If people are going to live by God's Word, they have to be taught it, and Jehoshaphat saw to it that that was done - a pattern for Christian teachers today.

Jehoshaphat's commitment - to trust the Lord, to take delight in the ways of the Lord, and to the teaching of the Word of God - is a model for us in our spiritual warfare. That was the secret of his strength.

We see his weakness in his compromise, and that compromise is recorded in one short sentence: "He joined affinity with Ahab" (18:1). II Corinthians 6:14 gives God's unqualified command: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." That is most often applied to marriage, and rightly so, but in II Corinthians it is in a much broader context than that. Some of the Christians in Corinth were sharing in feasts in idol temples, and it was to underline how dangerous that was that Paul laid down the principle, applicable to marriage and everything else, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." There are many kinds of entanglements with the world that can cripple a Christian leader's service.

For Jehoshaphat compromise began with marriage, not his own, but in his giving his son Jehoram in marriage to the daughter of Ahab, Athaliah, described in II Chronicles 24:7 as "that wicked woman, whose sons had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the Lord did they bestow upon the Baals." The next generation showed the results of the unequal yoke which Jehoshaphat put upon his son.

Of course, more than an unequal yoke in marriage was involved, for the purpose of the marriage was a political alliance with Ahab. Perhaps Jehoshaphat had the idea that this marriage might bring the divided nations of Israel and Judah together again, but the political alliance, like the marriage, was an unequal yoke.

Jehoshaphat's experience confirms the truth that where there is an unequal yoke, it is almost invariably the unbelieving partner who has the greater say. Ahab was clearly the more influential partner, for when he asked Jehoshaphat, "Wilt thou go with me to Rameth-gilead," to fight against it, Jehoshaphat could only say, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war," though the rest of the

chapter shows that he was anything but happy about it (18:3). Jehoshaphat's subordination in the alliance was seen, too, in the fact that he had to accept Ahab's suggestion that he would go into the battle in disguise, but Jehoshaphat would wear his royal robes. Ahab the unbelieving partner had his way.

Jehoshaphat's compromise had far-reaching effects then and in the next generation, but God did not forsake him, but rather corrected him. Correction came first from the prophet Micaiah, who warned Jehoshaphat and Ahab about what the outcome of the battle at Ramoth-gilead would be: "I did see all Israel scattered upon the mountains" (18:16). Correction came, too, from the narrow escape that Jehoshaphat had when the captains of the enemy's chariots mistook him for Ahab and surrounded him. "Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him; and God moved them to depart from him." So often a narrow escape like that is God's way of showing us how foolish we have been.

The sternest correction came from another prophet, Jehu (19:1-3): "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord." But there was comfort even in the rebuke: "Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God." In spite of his compromise Jehoshaphat had set his heart to seek the Lord. Verse 4 suggests that Jehoshaphat accepted the rebuke and the correction, and then carried on with his work of bringing the people back to God. He had come back himself, and he wanted to bring others back too.

That led on to the wonderful victory that God gave when warfare was renewed, as recorded in chp. 20. Jehoshaphat's prayer in that chapter gives a wonderful pattern for us as we are called to wage our spiritual warfare. He began by speaking of God's sovereign control of all things and God's mighty power. He went on to recall God's mighty deeds on behalf of his people in the past and His fulfilment of His promises. He quoted part of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple: "If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgement, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence (for thy name is in this house) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help" (20:8,9). Here is God's word for us in every time of testing: we can be sure that He will hear and help.

Jahaziel, speaking by the Spirit of the Lord, confirmed that victory would be given, and recalled two earlier events in Israel's history. He echoed David's words to Goliath: "The battle is the Lord's" (v.15), and the words of Moses to the people of Israel hemmed in between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea: "Stand still and see the salvation of God" (v.17). It is as if God were saying to a new generation, "What I have done before, I can do again." So it is that victory is given.

Victory may be won, but the battle goes on, and there can be no relaxing of effort or watchfulness. For in Jehoshaphat we see compromise repeated in his taking on once again the unequal yoke, recorded in the closing verses of chp. 20. His previous alliance with Ahab had been matrimonial and political; this one with Ahaziah was commercial, to build ships, probably for the transport of metals. It was an alliance with a king of Israel who did very wickedly; it was an unequal yoke. But can we not believe that God acted in grace again as well as judgment, when the ships were broken by the Lord (v.37); and that the failure of that commercial alliance was God's way of bringing Jehoshaphat back to his original commitment to the Lord alone? We are not told that it was so, but can we not thank God that often He has shattered plans that we were making, plans that might have drawn us away from Him? Let Jehoshaphat remind us of the need for constant vigilance in face of the warfare in which we are involved; and let us ask the Lord, by whatever means He chooses, to keep us faithful in the fight.

Joash: Instruction and Influence

Foremost among the strengths which made Joash an outstanding leader for the greater part of his reign was his willingness to be instructed. That was accompanied by a concern for the house of God and a gift for inspiring people to give liberally for the Lord's work. But after the death of Jehoiada who had been his mentor from his earliest days his strengths turned to weaknesses and his victory over the Baals to shameful defeat. We look first at his strengths.

(1) He showed a willingness to be instructed. II Chronicles 24:2 says simply, "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest." But the parallel account in II Kings 12:2 gives an additional detail: "Jehoash" - a longer form of his name - "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days in which Jehoiada instructed

him.” What a privilege he had, to be brought up in the house of God for the first seven years of his life and to be instructed by God’s priest. He was willing to receive instruction not only in those decisive early years, but right on to the end of Jehoiada’s very long life. One essential quality for leadership in spiritual warfare is a willingness to be instructed by God’s messengers and from God’s Word.

(2) He showed a concern for God’s house: “Joash was minded to repair the house of the Lord” (24:4). That was an evidence of his determination to reverse the evil that Athalia his grandmother and her sons had done in breaking up the house of God and bestowing all the dedicated things upon the Baals (24:7). There was an urgency about his exhortation to the Levites and a realisation about the need for a continuing concern for God’s house: “Go out into the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that ye hasten the matter” (24:5). Spiritual warfare against the forces of evil needs that kind of constant commitment to the house of God.

(3) Joash had a gift for inspiring people to give liberally. The Levites had failed to collect the contributions that were due from every Israelite. But Joash organised a new method of collection - a chest set outside the house of the Lord - and the people took it up with enthusiasm and there was an abundance of money to pay the workmen to whom the repairing of the Temple was entrusted. When the repairs were completed, the people showed their continuing commitment to the Lord and to His house by offering their burnt-offerings continually all the days of Jehoiada (24:9-14). To stimulate joyful sacrificial giving like that can still be a qualification for leadership in spiritual warfare.

The record makes it clear again and again that behind the strengths of Joash was the influence of Jehoiada. But Jehoiada died, and the strengths of Joash turned to weaknesses. The sad fact was that his weaknesses were just his strengths turned right around. Shakespeare had the right way of it when he wrote: “Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.” So we look at the weaknesses of Joash as the festering of his strengths, taking them in reverse order.

(1) Joash’s gift for inspiring people to give liberally for the house of God was reversed when, as is recorded II Kings 12, Hazael king of Syria threatened Jerusalem. “And Jehoash king of Judah took all the hallowed

things that Jehoshaphat, and Jehoram, and Ahaziah, his fathers, kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own hallowed things, and all the gold that was found in the treasures of the house of the Lord, and in the king's house, and sent it to Hazael king of Syria: and he went away from Jerusalem." His strength had been in collecting money for the house of God: now that strength turned to weakness when he took wealth from the house of God to bribe Hazael king of Syria.

(2) The concern of Joash for the house of God was reversed when after the death of Jehoiada the leaders of Judah influenced Joash, "and they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served groves and idols..." (II Chron. 24:17,18). Joash was not left without correction, for God sent to him and his people prophets "to bring them again unto the Lord; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear" (24:19).

(3) In that refusal to listen to God's messengers was the most serious reversal of all. For many years Joash had been willing to be instructed by Jehoiada, but now when Jehoiada's son, Zechariah, challenged him and the leaders of Judah, "they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the Lord" (24:21). (This was the incident referred to by Christ in Luke 11:51) For that rejection of God's message and God's messenger judgment was inevitable. When Zechariah died, he said, "The Lord look upon it, and require it."

The consequences of Joash's reversals of earlier standards came quickly. "At the end of the year the host of Syria came up against him" (24:23ff). This time they were not to be bought off, and the shame of the defeat of Joash was that only a small company of the Syrians was able to conquer the great host of Judah. The man who refuses to be instructed, who loses his concern for the house of God, and who misuses the wealth of God, is an easy prey for the enemy.

Was there any one thing that led to the failure of Joash? His dependence on Jehoiada, and his openness to the evil influence of the princes of Judah after Jehoiada's death, suggest that his faith was not entirely his own. He was depending on someone else's faith, and a second-hand faith was not strong enough to meet the challenge when it came. It never is. We cannot bring the challenge of Joash's failure to those who are called to spiritual warfare today more effectively than in words from a sermon of J.S. Stewart, published more than fifty years ago:

What, in our religious life, are we founding on - mere hearsay, rumour blown down the centuries from apostolic days, other men's thoughts of Jesus caught and put in cold storage and preserved and handed out to us - is that it? Or are we founding not on that, but on this - a Christ we have spoken to and can speak to daily, face to face and heart to heart; an experience of Jesus thrilling and throbbing and glorious because we can say of it, "This is my own, my very own"; something that has come to us not on the authority of any Church or creed, not on the authority of our forefathers, not even on the authority of all the millions of believers who have ever lived, but on the authority of God and our own souls?²

Amaziah: Reliance on the Lord and Reliance on the World

II Chronicles summarizes the life of Amaziah in one sentence: "Amaziah did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart." The Hebrew word translated 'perfect' basically means 'complete.' Amaziah did what was right in the sight of the Lord, but he did not carry it through to the end. So he joins the other kings of Judah who fell out in the last lap. His strength lay in his relying on the Lord alone: his weakness showed itself when, incredibly, he turned away from the Lord and set up the gods of the Edomites, whom he had defeated, to be his gods. He turned from relying on the Lord to relying on the world that was opposed to God.

The evidence of Amaziah's strength is given in 25:11: "He strengthened himself and led forth his people and killed ten thousand of the children of Seir," the Edomites, and ten thousand more prisoners of war. He had marshalled three hundred thousand of the fighting men of Judah and Benjamin for the battle; but then he showed a hint of the weakness that would manifest itself more clearly later: "He hired also a hundred thousand mighty men of valour out of Israel for a hundred talents of silver" - estimated by James Moffatt in 1924 at £41,250 - because he felt he needed reinforcements to guarantee success against the enemy. A prophet of the Lord came to him to tell him of the folly of seeking help from Israel, who had turned away from the Lord, and warned him that if he persisted in his purpose he would fall away before the enemy. Once again God gave His injunction to His people not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. To his credit, Amaziah listened to the message of the man of God, though he was reluctant to see all that money that he had paid for reinforcements wasted. His strength was to trust in the Lord alone and not to rely for help on those who had turned away from the Lord.

It seems incredible that a man who had made that decision, and paid dearly for it, for the disappointed mercenaries turned against some of the cities of Judah, should, after his victory over the Edomites, set up the gods of the Edomites to be his gods (25:14). And yet it happened, and still happens when a man who has professed commitment to the Lord and trusted in the Lord falls away to the world, because he thinks that the world can further the ambitions which he has.

God sent a prophet to rebuke Amaziah, but this time, like his father Joash before him, he refused to listen to the advice which was given to him (25:16), and threatened the prophet who gave it. He followed his father's bad example further in taking bad advice and issuing a challenge to Joash, king of Israel. Joash did his best to dissuade him with a clever little parable about a thistle which challenged a cedar of Lebanon and was trampled down by a wild beast. But Amaziah insisted, and suffered a disastrous defeat, involving the loss of the Temple treasures.

Amaziah's end came later when his subjects made a conspiracy against him and killed him, perhaps because of the humiliation that they had suffered at the hands of Joash, king of Israel - a tragic end after a good beginning. The inspired historian gives the reason for the tragedy in one brief sentence: "Amaziah turned away from following the Lord" (25:27). There are many ways in which it can happen, but the end result is the same. Whatever his motives, a man turns away from following the Lord; then his strength becomes weakness, and his usefulness is finished.

Uzziah: Seeking the Lord and Self-centred Pride

The strength and weakness of Uzziah are summarised in a few lines in II Chronicles 26:15b and 16: "He was marvellously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction." His life-story falls into two clearly-marked divisions - the time of his seeking the Lord and his time of self-centred pride.

Uzziah "sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions" - literally, in the seeing - "of God: and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper." We have already noted in Asa that qualification of seeking the Lord as essential for spiritual warfare. There is an added emphasis here in the case of Uzziah. Literally, "he was for

seeking the Lord.” That suggests that resolve and effort are needed. Elsewhere we are reminded that seeking the Lord involves a personal relationship with Him. In the time of Uzziah, God said to the people of Israel, “Seek ye Me, and ye shall live; but seek not Bethel.” (Amos 5:4,5). They thought that seeking the Lord meant going to church, but what was needed was a personal relationship with a Person. The same thought is implied in this verse which describes Uzziah as seeking God in the days of Zechariah who had understanding in the seeing of God. Seeking God involves a desire to see Him for oneself.

In the days of his seeking the Lord, God gave Uzziah success. That success was seen in different areas: God gave him victory over his enemies, including long-standing enemies like the Philistines (26:7); he was able to provide fortifications to defend Jerusalem against attack (26:9); and, in a very different area, he was successful in agriculture - “He also built towers in the desert and dug many cisterns, because he had much livestock in the foothills and in the plain. He had people working his fields and vineyards in the hills and in the fertile lands, for he loved the soil” (NIV, 26:10). That area of success may seem strange when set alongside the others - battle and defence - and yet perhaps not so strange after all, for if any man realises his dependence on God and his need to seek the Lord’s help it is a farmer.

Uzziah’s success is summarised in 26:15b: “His name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong.” Literally, “He did marvellously in being helped,” and the word used has a note of the miraculous in it: behind his success there was the mighty power of God. If Uzziah had remembered that, the next sentence would not have needed to be written: “But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction.” Once a man forgets that anything that he has been able to accomplish is the Lord’s doing his strength is turned to tragic weakness. Uzziah’s self-centred pride was his undoing.

The seriousness of Uzziah’s sin is seen in the assessment of it found in 26:16: “He transgressed against the Lord his God.” Literally, “He proved unfaithful to the Lord his God.” He gave to something else - himself - what belonged to God alone, when in his pride and arrogance he took upon him the privilege that belonged to God’s appointed priests alone. Self and self-esteem took the place of God. It happened when he became strong and forgot that his strength came from God.

The enormity of what he did is seen in the punishment that he received. The mark of God's displeasure was imprinted on his flesh when leprosy broke out in his forehead. His usefulness was at an end, for Jotham his son took over the throne. He was cut off from worship as a leper; indeed, he cut himself off from the house of God. He had tried to make God's house his house, to do as he pleased there, and now he was left with only the separate house of a leper.

Is there an answer to failure like that of Uzziah? Isaiah 6 tells us that there is, not only in pointing from an earthly king who had failed to the Lord sitting upon the throne in perfect holiness - the persistent failure of the kings of Judah underlines the truth that the fulfilment of the prophecies of the kingdom is still to come in a Son of David yet to be manifested - but also in bringing good news of cleansing for the unclean. Was Isaiah thinking of the leprosy of Uzziah when he said, "I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips"? The word translated 'unclean' in Isaiah 6:5 is used in Leviticus with reference to leprosy. Was he thinking of the king who had been "cut off from the house of the Lord" (II Chron. 26:21) when he cried out, "Woe is me: for I am cut off" (AV margin)? Whether the link with Uzziah is as clear as it seems to be or not, the assurance of cleansing from uncleanness is unmistakable: "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is atoned for." There is the answer to failure like that of Uzziah.

Hezekiah: Commendation and Condemnation

The history of Hezekiah, as recorded in II Kings, II Chronicles and the prophecy of Isaiah, is a lengthy one, but his strength and his weakness are summarised in two verses in II Chronicles: "In every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart and prospered" (31:21); "Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart" (32:21).

There was a great deal to commend in Hezekiah. What he did "in the service of the house of God" was to have the Levites to be diligent in the repair and cleansing of the Temple (29:3-5). Taking 'service' in the sense of worship, we learn that he organised the sin-offering for the kingdom, and

for the sanctuary, and for Judah (29:21), and led the people in an exultant offering of the burnt-offering (29:27-35). The worship culminated in an unforgettable Passover, to which Hezekiah called not only Judah but the northern section of the kingdom, Israel. "And all the congregation of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the congregation that came out of Israel, and the strangers that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced. So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem" (30:25,26). In all that Hezekiah did "in the service of the house of God...he did it with all his heart, and prospered."

A second area in which Hezekiah gave commendable service was "in the law and in the commandments." He instituted a wide series of reforms that did away with the pagan worship of idols that had infiltrated into the worship of Judah. God had laid down commands for worship and for living, and Hezekiah responded to the message of the prophets - particularly Isaiah and Micah - who called the people back to obedience to God's law.

Behind all that Hezekiah did in the service of the house of God and in bringing his people back to obedience to the law of God there was his desire "to seek his God" (31:21). That was basic. His seeking of the Lord took on a special urgency on two occasions, once when Sennacherib and his army swept down on Jerusalem like a wolf on the fold, and God gave a miraculous deliverance; and again when he was sick unto death and was miraculously healed. In all for which Hezekiah was so highly commended we have again a clear pattern for our spiritual warfare. A concern for the service of the house of God, and, above all, a constant seeking of the Lord, all done with all the heart, add up to true success.

Sadly, it was when Hezekiah was at the peak of his success that commendation turned to condemnation. The Chronicler puts his finger on ingratitude and pride as indications of his deterioration: "But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done to him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem" (II Chron. 32:25). It has been suggested that the illness which struck Hezekiah after the wonderful deliverance from Sennacherib was a message from God to reprove him for a failure in thankfulness and for pride that took the glory to himself, setting his ingratitude and pride in the context of the defeat of Assyria. (So J.R. Lumby in Kings, Cambridge Bible) We cannot be sure, for his ingratitude and pride could be set just as readily in

the context of his recovery from his illness. What matters is that he repented: "Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart..." (32:26). There is a way back from the ingratitude and pride that can cripple a man in his spiritual warfare.

Even more serious was Hezekiah's further lapse. The account in II Chronicles 32:31 simply tells that "in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." The record in II Kings 20:12ff fills in the details, and tells of the condemnation that came upon Hezekiah and why it came.

It did not seem a very serious thing that Hezekiah did when he received the ambassadors of Babylon who came to congratulate him on his recovery, and when he showed them everything that he had in his house; that, it might be thought, scarcely merited Isaiah's terrifying censure: "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord." (II Kings 20:17). But the fact was that Merodach-baladan, a Chaldean prince who had been installed as king of Babylon, was fishing with a long line. He planned to rebel against Assyria, and he wanted Hezekiah's help. Hezekiah's friendly reception of the ambassadors and his willingness to display his resources were a tacit expression of his readiness to aid Merodach-baladan in his attempt to bring down Assyria. That was contrary to everything that Isaiah had taught and stood for throughout the years, when his message was that Judah must trust in the Lord alone and not in the arm of man. It was a compromise with the world that brought on Hezekiah the full weight of condemnation.

What are we to make of Hezekiah's response to the message of condemnation: "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?" (II Kings 20:19). It might seem that he was only showing relief that judgment is not going to come in his time, as one commentator puts it, "in the spirit of the sorry words from Munich in 1939."³ It is better to see Hezekiah's words, "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken" as an expression of submission and repentance, and his words, "Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days", as an expression of gratitude that he is still living in a day of grace. Certainly all of us who are called to spiritual warfare today must lay aside our ingratitude and our pride and our willingness to yield to the flattery and the seduction of the world, and rest only in the grace in which we stand.

Josiah: Devotion and Defection

Josiah is the saddest example of the kings of Judah who fell out in the last lap. He did it literally when he fell in battle at Megiddo in a needless confrontation with Necho, king of Egypt.

His story has a special interest for us as we think of spiritual warfare, for more than the kings who preceded him he battled against principalities and powers of evil rather than physical enemies. When he turned aside from that spiritual warfare to take up earthly weapons against Necho king of Egypt the tragedy of his decline and death ended what had been a wonderful prospect of spiritual victory.

His strength in spiritual warfare stemmed from his devotion. That devotion was seen first in his return to the Lord: "In the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father" (II Chron. 34:3). There followed his rejection of the idols: "He began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images." In our spiritual warfare the pressures of the world and the seductions of worldliness have to be dealt with as ruthlessly as Josiah dealt with the idolatry of his day.

Next there was the repair of God's house, leading on to the rediscovery of the Word of God, incredibly lost in the house of God. Devotion as an essential part of spiritual warfare must still get back to that. The rediscovery of the book of the law led on to repentance from sin, when Josiah humbled himself and rent his clothes and wept before the Lord. Repentance like that is again a vital part of devotion.

Finally, Josiah's devotion came to its climax in his rededication to the covenant: "The king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book" (34:31). The rededication of the people to the covenant was less than whole-hearted, but there was no doubt about the completeness of Josiah's commitment. His devotion was with all his heart and all his soul.

Sadly, Josiah's devotion was not maintained. So, thinking of his weakness, we look at his defection.

After his wonderful reformation in Judah, culminating in an unforgettable passover, Josiah, quite incomprehensibly, went out to fight with Necho, king of Egypt, at Megiddo, notwithstanding Necho's solemn warning: "What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah?... Forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy thee not" (35:21). But Josiah did not heed Necho's words, spoken, as the record tells us, "from the mouth of God", and went out to perish tragically and needlessly at Megiddo.

Why did Josiah do it? The answer lies in the historical situation. Assyria, the enemy whom God's people had feared for so long, was in decline: the Medes and the Chaldeans were gathering for the kill. And just at that point, as secular history tells us, Necho, king of Egypt, decided to intervene on the side of Assyria, not out of any love for Assyria, but apparently because he preferred a weak Assyria to the north rather than an all-conquering Babylon. The disappearance of Assyrian domination was what God's people had hoped for and prayed for; now that it seemed to be imminent, Josiah was determined that nothing should stop it. Assyria must be destroyed, and if Egypt made a move to help Assyria, then Egypt must be resisted.

Josiah made at least two fatal mistakes. For one thing he mistook the enemy - not Assyria but national sin and forgetfulness of God. At first Josiah saw clearly what the real threat to Judah was; hence his wonderful reforms. But then he got deflected, side-tracked into thinking that the enemy most to be feared was Assyria. It is a mistake that can still be made: let us never forget that the real enemy is sin, in ourselves, in the church, as well as in the world.

Josiah's second error lay in mistaking politics for religion. A great conflict between world powers was in progress, and he must have a hand in it. So the Devil got him deflected from what was God's real work for him. And that can still happen. God would say to those who are called to Christian leadership in the preaching of the gospel, "Mind your own business," and our business is not the tangled world of political or social issues, but the preaching of the good news of Jesus Christ. It is true that if the gospel of Jesus Christ is applied, it will have its influence on political and social issues, but let first things be first. We must not be deflected from what is the church's primary task.

Can we go one step further and ask how Josiah came to be deflected from his devotion, from spiritual warfare to earthly warfare that ended his reformation? We find it in one word - disillusionment.

The weakness of Josiah's reformation was that it was not really supported by the mass of the people. The people stood to the covenant but not like Josiah, who did it with all his heart and soul. As soon as Josiah was dead, his successors, as we read in II Kings 23, did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that their fathers had done. The people concurred, and all the old evils came sweeping back. A recent commentator on II Chronicles, Michael Wilcock, puts it like this: "The young king carries through the sweeping reforms of chapter 34 in a strangely solitary way. His foes are many, his allies are few. In his endeavours to lead his nation forward in the ways of God, the times are not with him...and the people are not with him either."⁴

Could it be that it was Josiah's disillusionment with a people who were not willing for a real change of heart that led him to turn from spiritual warfare that did not seem to be achieving anything to a political and military involvement that might show some tangible results? Are there ministers who have turned away from an evangelical ministry to something second-rate because they saw nothing happening in the hearts and lives of their people? Are men being deflected from their primary task because of disillusionment? Christ's word comes to all of us: "Take heed how ye hear."

We must not end on a note of disillusionment. As we learn from Jeremiah 1:2, Jeremiah wrote in the time of Josiah and in the time of the weak kings who succeeded him. And Jeremiah had another answer to the disillusionment of the day in which he lived. The old covenant had been broken by a wayward people, but that did not justify despair. For the message had come forth from the Lord: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers...which my covenant they brake... This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his brother saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them" - not just the king, or any leader standing in isolation, but all of them.

Living in the day of the new covenant, a covenant sealed by the blood of Christ and realised in Him, we need not allow anything to deflect us from the task committed to us and the spiritual warfare which we must wage, for in Christ our King the victory has been won - a victory that all who are in Him will share - and He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. And to Him shall be all the glory!

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This paper was originally given at the Summer School in Theology, held by the Free Church of Scotland in Larbert, September 1992.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COVENANT

An Introductory Study in Biblical Theology

by Peter E. Golding

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Charles Haddon Spurgeon affirms that the doctrine of the covenants is the key to theology. It is not difficult to see the reason for such an assertion. The term 'covenant' is a biblical one, and any theology which regards the Bible as its canon of faith must inevitably recognize the frequency with which the divine provision of salvation is construed in convenantal forms.

The Covenant Principle Fundamental in Scripture

More recent scholarship supports this thesis: "the covenant idea provides the key to understanding the unity and diversity found in Scripture... It is the divine initiatives represented in the covenants of Scripture that structure biblical history".¹ In fact, in view of the pervasive Scriptural evidence to that effect, it is not claiming too much to say that the idea of the covenant is the principle around which the saving relation of God to men is organised. The Bible is, among other things, a book of history, but it is concerned with more than human events, for the history of the Bible is redemptive history.

However, "several events stand out above others in the history of redemption as it unfolds... Each of these events involved the establishment of a covenant... A convenantal structure underlies the programme of redemption."² Clearly, this structure is not confined to the Old Testament, for we read in the Gospels of a new covenant in Jesus' blood.

It is a simple matter of fact that, as one modern writer puts it

the role of the covenants in Scripture has not always held the position in critical biblical scholarship that it does at the present. Only recently has the pivotal position of the covenant concept been recognized in the widest possible circles.³

Another way of putting this is to say that there has been a new emphasis, especially in this present century, on biblical, as distinct from systematic theology; and the covenant concept is clearly indispensable to a properly formulated biblical theology. Biblical theology deals with the content of Scripture from the standpoint of its history, and especially in its development. In a reference to covenant theology, Geerhardus Vos says that it

has from the beginning shown itself possessed of a true historic sense in the apprehension of the progressive character of the deliverance of truth.⁴

To quote Vos again,

Biblical Theology is that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible.⁵

Biblical theology recognizes that divine revelation is on-going, and was given by process. This process, however, was not one of continuous and uniform progression. Rather, as John Murray affirms

The pattern which Scripture discloses shows that special revelation and the redemptive accomplishments correlative with it have their marked epochs... The science concerned with the history of special revelation must take account of this epochal character and it would be an artificial biblical theology that did not adhere to the lines which this epochal feature prescribes.⁶

It is to be regretted, therefore, that much of recent biblical theology, in its reconstruction of biblical history, has only served to undermine the foundations of biblical theology. For instance, it is customary to question, if not deny, the authenticity of the patriarchal history as set forth in Genesis. Walter Eichrodt, who correctly attributes Primacy to the covenant relationship, does not go back farther than Mosaic times to find this covenant concept.⁷ However, according to Scripture itself, the Exodus cannot be biblically understood unless it is recognized to be in fulfilment of the covenant with the patriarchs. (cf. Exod.2:24,25; 3:6-17). According to

Paul, the Mosaic covenant should be understood as an appendage to the Abrahamic (cf. Gal.3:17-22). It is clear that the covenantal institution is fundamental to any construction of redemptive history that is according to Scripture. But the history of the covenant in the Bible is severed from its roots unless we go back to its origins in the covenants made with Abraham (Gen.15:8-21; 17:1-21). In the words of John Murray, "the theology which can dispense with this central feature of patriarchal history is not biblical theology."⁸

If biblical theology is conceived of as concerned with the on-going process of God's redemptive revelation in Scripture, then it ought by rights to be linked up with the successive unfolding of covenant grace - from its beginnings.

That being so, G. Ernest Wright is surely correct in advising us that

as Christians we must press towards a *Biblical* theology, in which both Testaments are held together in an organic manner...a Biblical theology is possible which is something other than the history of the Bible's religious evolution.⁹

In other words, covenant theology is concerned with the biblical data in its organic and progressive character, its historical development. It is what Ludwig Diestel describes as "the organic-historical method".¹⁰ Students of historical theology have recognized that covenant theology marked "an epoch in the appreciation and understanding of the progressiveness of divine revelation".¹¹

However, although covenant theology did not receive its classic formulation until the seventeenth century, Calvin had already given clear expression to the historic progressiveness and continuity of redemptive revelation. We see this in his "Institutes of the Christian Religion" (Book II, chapters x and xi), where he sets out in some detail the similarities and differences of the two Testaments. In that connection he says:

The Covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation.¹²

However, covenant theology not only recognizes the organic unity and development of divine revelation, but also the fact that the religious faith

which the covenant brings into being is a covenant faith; thus, "I will be to you a God, and ye shall be to me a people" (Lev.26:12). The relationship brought into being by God with Abraham was a covenant relationship, and it is in terms of the Abrahamic covenant that in him and his progeny all the nations of the earth would be blessed, and that the Son of God became incarnate. Thus the new covenant in Christ is but the unfolding and flowering of the covenant with Abraham.

Space will not permit a study of each covenant in detail, but consideration may be given to the distinctive character of each, with particular attention to the way in which each successive covenant builds on and advances from those that have preceded it. In this way, not only will their unity and continuity be apparent, but also their organic connection.

The Adamic Administration

It is often confidently assumed that Scripture does not apply the designation *covenant* to the relation between God and Adam. The real problem, however, is not whether the actual term *covenant* is used, but whether the reality is present. There is good reason to suppose that it does, in both the pre-lapsarian and the post-lapsarian states of man.

(1) The Pre-Lapsarian

In the creation narrative of Genesis 1 and 2, the word covenant is not mentioned. The first reference in the Bible is in Genesis 6:18, in the prediluvian covenant with Noah. However, the word is introduced there without explanation, with the possible explanation that Noah was cognizant of a divine covenant of some kind which was already in existence. In fact, God speaks of "my covenant", which suggests that He is already known by Noah and his ancestors as the God who makes covenants. Furthermore, the terminology used at this point is particularly significant. It is not the verb *KARATH*, which is usually employed when a covenant is being initiated, (e.g. Gen.15:18). However, when a covenant is *confirmed*, having already been initiated, a different verb is used - *NATAN*, meaning "establish". This is used, for example, in Genesis 17:1-2, where the NIV correctly renders the Hebrew: "I will *confirm* my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." The covenant being confirmed is clearly that made

with Abram in Genesis 15:18, although Genesis 12:2,3 may also be in view.

From all this, it seems clear that for a covenant to be described as being confirmed, it must already be in force, i.e. already “cut” or initiated. When this perspective is applied to Genesis 6:18, it can be seen that when a verb is used which means “cause to stand” (the NIV translation, “I will establish”, is misleading here), reference is being made to a covenant already in existence. If it be objected that, in the previous chapters of Genesis, the word covenant is not used, it can be replied that neither is it used in Genesis 12:2-3, although as has already been seen, God there made promises to Abram which can only be described as covenant promises, which He subsequently *confirmed* to him (Gen. 17:2,NIV).

It seems apparent, then, that Genesis 6:18 refers to a covenant *already in existence*.

God is declaring his willingness to persevere with what has already been set up...the commitment of God to the total created order therefore seems to be in view.¹³

Karl Barth has no hesitation, therefore, in speaking of creation as a covenant.¹⁴ A careful reading of Genesis 1-3 will show it to be a precursor of the later covenants to which are attached blessings and curses - the former conditional upon covenant fealty, the latter visited upon disloyalty to the covenant (e.g., Deut. 28:3-14; 15-45).

This blessings-curses pattern is clearly visible in the first three chapters of Genesis. God blessed man (1:28), and to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil He appended the curse of death, should its fruit be disobediently eaten (2:17). Not only so, but Hosea 6:17, which the AV translates “They like men have transgressed the covenant”, “should almost certainly be rendered as in the Revised Version, ‘They *like Adam* have transgressed the covenant’.”¹⁵

It seems quite clear, then, that there was a covenant between God and Adam, *de facto*, if not *expliciter*. The threat that he would surely die was conditional; and the threat itself implied the promise that if he did not disobey, he would continue to live. However, “we must be careful not to embarrass this doctrine by misguided speculation as to what might have happened if Adam had kept the covenant.”¹⁶ This original covenantal

arrangement, which has been variously called “the Covenant of Works”, “the Covenant of Life”, and more recently, “the Covenant of Creation”, should not be confused with what Scripture refers to as the Old Covenant or first covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; 2 Cor. 3:14; Heb. 8:7,13). The first or old covenant is the Sinaitic, which, contrary to some current opinion, was basically redemptive in character. The Adamic covenant, however, had no redemptive provision and applied only to the state of innocence.

(2) *The Post-Lapsarian*

If, then, we can find the elements of a covenant present, even when there is no express use of the word itself, there is one interpretation only which does justice to the Scriptural data, and that is the one

which takes seriously the claims of the Bible that God truly entered into covenant with unfallen Adam, and that he again entered into covenant with fallen Adam.¹⁷

This fact is basic to a true understanding of all Old Testament revelation, and upon it all subsequent revelation is built.

Although man fell and came under the sanctions of “the Covenant of Works”, God immediately revealed to him in embryonic form a redemptive economy. This is found in Genesis 3:15, with its promise of victory for the woman’s Seed over the serpent and his malice, and sometimes referred to as the Protevangelium, the first announcement of the Gospel.

Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace...¹⁸

Bavinck comments “In this mother-promise is contained nothing less than the announcement and institution of the covenant of grace.”¹⁹

The Noahic Covenant

The *pre-diluvian* covenant made with Noah contains the first explicit reference to covenant, as has already been noted. However, as this covenant is only anticipatory of the *post-diluvian* covenant of Genesis 9:8-17, which has been described as “the second major covenant of Scripture” (Macleod)

- the first being the covenant of works - the latter merits special consideration.

This is the so-called covenant of preservation or common grace, and is concerned primarily with the temporal rather than the spiritual, with the realm of nature rather than grace. However, although this covenant secures only natural blessings, it should not be altogether dissociated from redemption. To begin with, the provisions of this covenant are the results of God's gratuitous favour - man does not earn or merit them. Moreover, this covenant of preservation is subordinate to the covenant of grace in that its purpose is to provide a framework within which the covenant of grace can operate. It is simply because mankind is redeemed in this world that the earth is made the subject of a covenant-undertaking. "The preservation is in order to redemption."²⁰

In other words, God has bound Himself by covenant-oath to preserve this world as an arena fit for human life. Clearly, "this does not mean that we are to face our ecological and environmental problems with indifference and indolence"²¹, but it does mean that our labours in these areas must be related to the divine promise of preservation, which provides both reassurance and incentive. "It is because of the Noahic Covenant that we know that our ecological labour is not in vain."²²

Three particular principles can be isolated for emphasis:

(1) *Sovereignty*. According to Murray, it is the post-diluvian Noahic covenant which, "perhaps more than any other in Scripture, assists us in discovering what the essence of covenant is".²³ The reason is its intense and pervasive monergism. It is clearly God's covenant, "in that it is conceived, devised, determined, established, confirmed, and dispensed by God himself".²⁴

(2) *Universality* - it is made with man universally - indeed its scope is even wider: "Behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you: *and* with every living creature that is with you" (Gen.9:9,10). The promise in this covenant is that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood. It affects for good not only those of mankind who are wholly unaware of its existence, but even those creatures who by definition can have no intelligent understanding of its import. "The whole tone...is accommodated to our need of simple reassurance".²⁵

(3) *Perpetuity* More fully, God binds himself to control the forces of nature, and to preserve the earth in its providential order, until the end of time (Gen.9:11,16).

The connection between the Noahic covenant and the covenant of creation has already been referred to in discussing the Pre-lapsarian covenant made under the Adamic administration. Genesis 9:9-17 clearly implies that the post-diluvian covenant with Noah “had been brought into existence by the act of creation itself”.²⁶ The reason is surely evident; namely, God’s refusal in the Noahic covenant to allow His intentions in creation to lapse.

The Abrahamic Covenant

As already indicated, the Noahic covenant was concerned primarily with the natural rather than the spiritual, and therefore was more closely linked with the pre-lapsarian covenant of creation than with the post-lapsarian covenant of grace. In the same way, the Abrahamic covenant was concerned *primarily* with the spiritual rather than the natural, and consequently connects more directly with the post-lapsarian covenant than with the Noahic covenant which immediately preceded it. The sequence, then, is as follows: If the protevangelium of Genesis 3:15 was the first announcement of the covenant of grace, then the next is found in Genesis 12, in the promise to Abram. The Covenant of Preservation with Noah falls *chronologically* between Genesis 3 and Genesis 12, but *theologically* considered, it should be placed in parenthesis.

It has been noted that the reality of covenant-relationship may be present, even when the term itself is absent, and this is evidently the case in Genesis 17:1-3. The promises made to Abram are not given formal covenant-status at this juncture, but the essence of covenant is clearly present. That covenant is then ratified by sacrifice and self-maledictory oath in Genesis 15, and confirmed by the sign of circumcision in chapter 17.

Certain features of the Abrahamic covenant need to be highlighted:

(1) *The Centrality, even primacy, of this particular covenant.* This is clearly apparent by the sheer number of occasions when it is referred to in Scripture, especially in the New Testament. The Noahic, Mosaic, and

Davidic covenants are all mentioned, but not to anything like the extent of the covenant with Abraham. Indeed, this covenant could be said to be the great theme of the New Testament. If it is objected that surely the greatest covenant by far is the new covenant in Christ, the Scripture itself would reply by saying that the *new* covenant is nothing more than the extension and fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant (e.g., Gal.3:8,9). The notion that when the New Testament refers to the superiority of the *New* covenant to the Old, that this refers to the Old Testament in its entirety, is a misapprehension. In each instance, the comparison is between the *New* Covenant and the *Mosaic* covenant, which was couched very largely in legal terms. Nowhere is the New Covenant contrasted invidiously with the Abrahamic. Christ made the *Mosaic* covenant “old” when he referred to the New Covenant in His blood, but the Abrahamic covenant still stands and comes to full fruition in the New. Consequently, the New Testament never once says that the Abrahamic covenant has passed away. Rather the opposite; the covenant with Abraham blesses all the nations of the earth, and Christian believers of every race are described as “children of Abraham” (Gen.12:3; Gal.3:29).

(2) *The Development of the covenant of grace is a marked characteristic of this particular covenant.* “The Abrahamic covenant...(is) a striking advance in the development of God’s gracious purpose towards men.”²⁷ The advance is seen primarily in this, that it marks a completely new phase in the divine purpose for mankind. Until this point in history, God had dealt with the human race as a whole. Individuals such as Abel, Enoch and Noah had been singled out for a special blessing, but the faithful were scattered among many branches of the human family. However, with the Abrahamic covenant, there is a narrowing down process, and the divine redemptive purpose is channelled into one particular branch of Noah’s family tree, the line that descends through Shem and Terah to Abram, of whom Christ was born. From now onwards, the main line of the covenant purpose in Christ is directed through this distinctive ethnic group.

(3) *As a consequence, the Abrahamic covenant sees the beginnings of the Church as a visible covenant community of believers and their children.* Here again, there is frequent misapprehension in that many think of the Church, the EKKLESIA, as beginning at Pentecost. But according to Paul’s illustration in Romans eleven, Gentile Christians are grafted in to a stock already in existence, the stock of Abraham.

(4) *The Central Promise of the Abrahamic Covenant is enunciated in Genesis 12:3, "And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you".* Other commitments are also made in the establishment of this covenant - the promise of the land of Canaan, for instance - but all are subsidiary to this, hence the repetition in Genesis 22 to reassure the faith of Abraham.

The grand purpose, then, of the Abrahamic covenant was to reveal the line from which the Seed of the woman would come. However, the Abrahamic covenant continues to be seen throughout the Old Testament "as the framework within which all other concepts of relationships which concern the people of God would arise." For instance, there is a clear link between the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenant, as will be seen. In summary, "the Kingdom of God established in global terms is the goal of the Abrahamic covenant."²⁸

The Mosaic Covenant

According to the biblical record, this covenant was formed with Moses (as the human mediator) subsequent to the deliverance of the Israelites from Pharaoh and the bondage in Egypt. It marks another momentous step forward in the unfolding history of redemption. The first express reference to the covenant made with Israel at Sinai is found in Exodus 19:5,6. It is highly significant, however, that when God revealed Himself to Moses way back in Exodus 3, in the episode of the burning bush, He did so as the God of Abraham, i.e., the God of the covenant. Clearly, then, there is an organic connection between these two epochs, the Abrahamic and the Mosaic.

Nevertheless, there is a distinctiveness about the Mosaic covenant which marks it out from all previous administrations. And this particular covenant is characterized above all by law; i.e., law in a codified, external form. The principles of law and grace operated in various ways in the Old Testament, but the peculiarity of the Mosaic Covenant was seen in the emphasis on earthly and temporal benefits which served to direct the Israelites to the heavenly and eternal realities. This accounted for the status of childhood for the Old Covenant Church - the people of God were restricted under the tutelage of the law of Moses (Gal.4:1-3). Consequently, physical blessings and punishments were related to the principle of works-inheritance, which was appropriate to the adumbratory and typological nature of the Mosaic administration.

However, Scripture is quite clear that this system was not to be construed as teaching justification by deeds of the law. The legal aspect of the Mosaic law was spoken of as a “covenant” because it was the characteristic means by which this particular administration operated. The error of the Judaizers was that they reduced the Mosaic covenant to a system of works-righteousness. They applied the works-merit principle from the pedagogical-typical sphere, where it did apply, to the spiritual-antitypical sphere, where it did not (Rom.9:32). In other words, “the legal principle which was operative in the Mosaic Covenant did not function in isolation from its broader redemptive context.”²⁹ The purpose of the law was pedagogical, therefore - to convict Israel of her inability to keep the law, and thus to point her to Christ (Gal.3:21-4:5).

Certain points may be noted which mark out the Mosaic Covenant as an obvious advance over previous covenantal administrations:

(1) *In its nationalizing of the people.* In the Abrahamic covenant, God dealt with a family. Now He covenants with a nation. Such a national covenant would be impossible without externally codified law. “Essential to the national solidifying of this people...was the definitive revelation of the will of God for the conduct of His people.”³⁰

(2) *In its comprehensiveness.* The “ten words” contain a complete summary of the moral law, an outline for the pattern of life expected of God’s holy people.

(3) *As a revealer of sin, thereby preparing for the grace of Christ.* According to Paul, the law was added to the Abrahamic covenant already (and still) in existence. But it was appended “because of transgressions, until the seed should come...” (Gal.3:19).

By exposing fully men’s inadequacy to establish righteousness by law-keeping...the law supplied a vital service to the Abrahamic covenant of promise.³¹

The Mosaic covenant, then, was not of a different order or genus from the Abrahamic covenant, but was an advance on it, albeit a kind of appendix.

The Davidic Covenant

If the Mosaic covenant does not manifest deviation from the fundamental concept of covenant, it would not be expected "that subsequent covenant administrations would evince a radically different conception." Indeed, the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants are so foundational to the whole subsequent process of redemptive history "that the later developments would be expected to confirm and intensify...the specific character of covenant administration."³² The covenant with David is referred to in Psalm 89:3,4,28,34. Although the word 'covenant' does not occur in 2 Samuel 7:12-17, it is clear that this is specifically the annunciation to David which is spoken of in Psalm 89 as the covenant made with David. By contrast with the Mosaic covenant, which was characterized by law, the Davidic covenant matches-up more closely with the Abrahamic, in that in both, the promissory element is predominant.

However, "the patriarchal promises were fulfilled with the growing of the Israelite population and with the inheritance of Palestine."³³ The Davidic covenant, as is clear from Psalms 2 and 110, had profound influence on later expectations in the Old Testament and even in the New.

As one contemporary writer has expressed it, the covenant with David "has all the marks of the covenant with Noah, Abraham, and Moses."³⁴ So there is no reversal or contradiction of earlier covenantal administrations. However, although the revelation of the covenant remains unchanged in its essence, there is advance and development in what is additional. Indeed, in the Davidic covenant, God's purposes to redeem a people unto himself "reach their climactic stage of realisation as far as the Old Testament is concerned."³⁵ Prior to this point, God had certainly revealed Himself as the Lord of the covenant. But now He openly situates His throne in a single locality. Rather than ruling from a mobile tabernacle, God reigns from Mount Zion in Jerusalem. Under David, then, both the kingdom and the King may be said to have come.

These Davidic promises are, of course, Messianic; "it is in Christ that David's seed is established for ever and his throne built up to all generations."³⁶ The whole point of this covenant is that it is made with David in his *kingly* office; in this way God establishes the manner in which He will reign over His people, by a King of His *own* appointing who will appear from the house and lineage of David (cf. Gen.49:10; Jer.33:14ff; Isaiah

11:1). So again, this narrowing-down process is evident in the promise of the Messiah. He who would be born “of a *woman*” (Gen.3:15), and the seed of *Abraham*, will spring from the tribe of *Judah*, of the house of *David*. Consequently, the birth of the Messiah is heralded in the New Testament in those terms (Matt.1:11). Referring to Psalm 89, A.M. Toplady writes: “Do you suppose this was spoken of David in his own person only? No indeed, but to David as type and forerunner of Christ.”

It is not surprising, then, that in Murray’s words:

No example of covenant in the Old Testament more clearly supports the thesis that covenant is sovereign promise, promise solemnized by the sanctity of the oath, immutable in its security and divinely confirmed as respects the certainty of its fulfilment.³⁷

To sum up: “The Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants do not supplant one another; they *supplement* one another.”³⁸

The Jeremianic Promise of a New Covenant (Jer.31:31-34).

The old (Sinaitic) covenant had received a new lease of life in Jeremiah’s early days, when the lost “book of the covenant” was found and reaffirmed, to become the blueprint of Josiah’s continuing reformation (2 Chron.34:30). Yet the response was only superficial and transient, and died with the death of Josiah. “This...was God’s moment to speak of a covenant that would be heart-deep and everlasting.”³⁹

The promise of a new covenant received its initial fulfilment in the return from exile (Jer.31:23-28), but the terms in which the prophecy is couched clearly transcend the post-exilic renewal, as the New Testament makes plain (Heb.8:8-12; 10:16-17). This new covenant is contrasted with the Mosaic covenant, not the *Abrahamic* covenant, be it noticed. As already noted, the Messianic age does not involve the establishment of a new covenant in relationship to the Abrahamic covenant, but only to the *Mosaic*. And in relation to the Mosaic economy, a new covenant was essential, because although the law was given to subserve the interests of grace, it was only given in external form, exemplified in the two tablets of stone on which the decalogue was engraved. This was an eloquent reminder of the utter inadequacy of the Old (Mosaic) Covenant to produce true obedience to the

law, standing as it did outside man. Hence the necessity of a *new* covenant, a covenant that will function as a living, vital principle within man, as distinct from a code of ethics external to him.

Needless to say, all this points forward supremely to the New Covenant in Christ, the central characteristic of which is the implantation of the law within the heart, and not just the imposition of it from without. Under the new dispensation of the Spirit, the believer is not only commanded to keep the (moral) law, but also he is further empowered and motivated to do so.

This brings us finally to:

The New Covenant in Christ

As indicated, “new” does not mean completely different;

Even the New Covenant is not so called because it is contrary to the first covenant, but because there is a clearer and fuller manifestation of the gratuitous adoption which the Abrahamic covenant revealed and the Mosaic confirmed.⁴⁰

That all Scripture, in one way or another, is pointing its readers to Christ, is a principle which no reverent Bible student will doubt. This being so, it is momentarily significant that when the Lord Jesus explained the memorial rite for Himself that He instituted, He spoke of the wine that they were to drink as symbolic of His blood, shed to ratify the new covenant (Matt.26:28; Mk.14:24; Lk.22:20). Here is a clear enunciation of the fulfilling of the pattern of Exodus 24 (Christ echoes directly the words of verse 8) and the promise of Jeremiah 31. Consequently, when the writer to the Hebrews explains the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ as the only source of salvation, he does so by depicting Him as the mediator of the new covenant (Heb.8:6). In this role, He supersedes (transcending and thereby cancelling) the inadequate Old Covenant institutions for dealing with sins and giving access to God.

However, the new economy as covenant attaches itself to the Old Testament covenant promise,

and cannot be contrasted with the Old Testament covenant in respect of that which constitutes the essence of covenant grace and promise.⁴¹

In other words, the spiritual relationship which lay at the centre of the covenant of grace disclosed throughout the Old Testament period reaches its apex in the new covenant. Indeed, “so great is the enhancement that a comparative contrast can be stated as if it were absolute.”⁴² Nevertheless, the superiority of the new does not consist in the abrogation of the (moral) law, “but in its being brought into more intimate relation to us and more effective fulfilment in us.”⁴³

Apart from the reference to the institution of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:25, the only passage in Paul where he refers expressly to the new covenant is 2 Corinthians 3. As H.N. Ridderbos says,

It is nowhere more apparent than here what a central significance the notion of the New Covenant occupies in Paul’s preaching.⁴⁴

It is the ministration of the Spirit as the Spirit of life (verses 6,8); it is the ministration of righteousness (verse 9), and of liberty (verse 17).

Furthermore, the new covenant is the dispensation of the forgiveness of sins (Heb.8:12). Finally, the new covenant is one that universalizes the diffusion of the knowledge of God (Heb.8:11). In all this, as we have found all along, we have the covenant

as a sovereign administration of grace and promise, constituting the relation of communion with God, coming to its richest and fullest expression.⁴⁵

At the centre of covenant revelation is the assurance: “I will be your God, and ye shall be my people”. This comes to its ripest and richest fruition in the New Covenant, of which by definition there can be no further expansion or enrichment, because in Christ, promise and fulfilment have received their *pleroma*. The biblical revelation, then, is a narrative of how “successive and cumulative revelations of God’s covenant purpose and provision were given and responded to at Key Points in history.”⁴⁶

We can fitly end as we began, with words from C.H. Spurgeon: “He who understands the covenant has reached the very core and marrow of the Gospel...”

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THE DOCTRINE OF CONVERSION IN THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

With special reference to the theology of Herman Hoeksema

by David Silversides

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As this year marks the 350th anniversary of the Westminster Assembly it is appropriate that we should look at some aspects of the Westminster Standards. In doing so, one aim is to urge you to encourage the study of these Standards in your congregation. There are marked differences between the Reformed and Puritan outlook of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms and much of today's evangelicalism. For example, the sin-consciousness of the Puritan age, among professing Christians, finds little modern-day counterpart. The notion of "entire sanctification" which gained considerable following in the past in Northern Ireland could never have reared its head if the exposition of the Law of God in the Catechisms had been known and laid to heart. Other examples could readily be given, but I want to encourage an appreciation of the precious heritage of the precisely worded biblical teaching that we have in the Westminster Standards.

The doctrine of conversion, we believe, highlights that precision. In looking at this subject we shall make occasional reference to the Dutch doctrinal standards, the "Three Forms of Unity" (i.e. the Canons of Dort, Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism). It is intended, however, to make particular reference at several points to the writings of the late Herman Hoeksema and Professor Herman Hanko. These writers represent the view of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America, a denomination founded in 1925 after controversy in the Christian Reformed Church of America on the questions of Common Grace and the Free Offer of the Gospel. Above all, we aim to bring out practical points for our work as ministers of the Word of God.

We shall arrange the material, in points of widely divergent length, around the concept of saving faith.

I Faith and Regeneration

“The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts.....” (WCF XIV/I). This teaches that regeneration is the cause of faith, not the other way round. (See also WCF X/I & II) Of course, this distinguishes the Reformed view from the Arminian. “Ye must be born again” (Jn 3:7) expresses Nicodemus’s need of a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, not something that he can bring about.

We are often amazed at the ludicrous religious views and theories men will believe. But we must remember that men can believe anything except the Gospel without a fundamental change of the heart. Sinners would always follow a David Koresh to Waco, Texas, rather than receive the true Gospel of Christ. When understood, the Gospel will always be bottom of the unregenerate world’s popularity poll of religious or philosophical doctrines. The Gospel so contradicts the pride of man that it will never be naturally received. Further, the more purely it is preached, the more consistently will it contradict that pride which is the essence of sin (Gen. 3:5).

Practical point : The lesson for us is the basic one that we will be relearning all our lives, that true conversions will result from our preaching insofar as the Holy Spirit regenerates sinners, no more and no less.

II Faith and the Word

“By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein; and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the Covenant of Grace.” (WCF XIV/II)

(a) *No Saving Faith without the Word*

Our Confession teaches that there is no saving faith apart from the Word of God. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” (Rom 1:17) The opening sentences of the Confession teach the same (see WCF I/I). There must be special revelation, however minimal, before there can be saving faith. W.G.T. Shedd asserts the idea of exceptions to this rule¹, but this is denied very explicitly by the Larger Catechism, Ans. 60, “They who, having never heard the Gospel, know not Jesus Christ, and believe not in Him, cannot be saved, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature.....”

(b) *Acceptance of the Divine Authority of Scripture*

The “accepting the Word for the authority of God Himself speaking therein” is also in line with the first chapter of the Confession as to how we come to a “full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority” of Scripture, namely by “the inward work of the Holy Spirit” (See WCF I/II).

Practical points :

1. Our preaching and missionary endeavour should, by its earnestness, reflect the fact that no rational adult can possibly be saved without hearing the Gospel.
2. The apologetic element in preaching should never concede that doubt of the authority of Scripture is ever morally neutral, rather than the result of sin.

III Faith and Justification

(a) *Faith is the instrument of justification.*

Those whom God effectually calleth, He also freely justifieth: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other

evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification..... (WCF XI/I & II).

Imputed and imparted righteousness are clearly distinguished. Also, faith as the instrument and Christ's atoning work as the legal ground of justification are clearly distinguished. Neonomianism (often linked with the name of Richard Baxter) taught that in some sense faith, or faith and its fruit, constituted the righteousness which makes the Christian accepted before God.

Even today, among their other errors, the "Jehovah's Witnesses" teach a variation on Neonomianism. They teach that Christ's ransom sacrifice merely gets us back to the starting line and we receive justification by faith. Faith, however, is construed as "faithfulness" or "loyalty" to God and His organization (The Watchtower). This misuse of the term faith can be confusing in discussion with them. It goes to show that new heresies are usually simply a new version of old ones.

(b) *Justification Follows Faith*

God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fulness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless, they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them. (WCF XI/IV)

(i) "Eternal Justification" Rejected

The Confession distinguishes between God's decree to justify the elect which is from eternity and God actually justifying the elect sinner which takes place in time when he is effectually called. In Romans 8:30 the order is clear; predestination (in eternity past), calling and justification (in time, the one immediately resulting from the other) and glorification (in eternity future).

The Belgic Confession seems to teach the same; ".....without presuming to trust in anything in ourselves, or in any merit of ours, relying and resting

upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours, when we believe in him".² At any rate, the Westminster Confession explicitly rejects the idea of the elect being justified from eternity.

(ii) The views of Herman Hoeksema et al.

Hoeksema states

first of all it should be remembered that objective justification is before faith. Objectively we are justified regardless of our faith. In eternal election all those given Christ by the Father are righteous before God for ever, and this righteousness cannot be contingent upon faith even though it is true that we cannot appropriate the gift of righteousness except by a true and living faith.³

Again, he says,

by faith, through the Gospel, we hear the declaration of God that He pronounces us righteous. By faith, therefore, I lay hold upon the righteousness which God, from eternity, has imputed to me.⁴

Yet again, Hoeksema writes, "God beholds his people eternally as perfectly righteous in the Beloved."⁵

Professor Herman Hanko, who follows Hoeksema's line of thought, in writing on the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican states,

Jesus refers to the consciousness of justification. God's elect are eternally justified. They are the elect whom God justifies from before the foundation of the world. But the parable speaks of the consciousness of this blessing of justification.⁶

This is contrary to the teaching of the Westminster Confession. Samuel Rutherford, one of the Scottish commissioners to the Westminster Assembly, reflects the teaching of the Confession he helped to draw up when he says,

Now, justification is a real favour applied to us in time, just as sanctification in the new birth: 'and such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified' (1 Cor. 6:11). Then were they sometimes not washed.⁷

In those cases where Hoeksema and Hanks acknowledge that the term justification refers to something that takes place in time, they seek to give the term a subjective sense. This procedure is arbitrary. Our Confession defines justification in objective, forensic terms and insists, with the Scriptures, that until effectually called, the elect are “children of wrath, even as others” (Eph. 2:3).

Practical point: When we address the unconverted, we address men and women who are all under actual condemnation. The Gospel we preach is not merely the means of bringing some to the realization of what was true anyway, but the means whereby children of wrath find actual forgiveness and deliverance from damnation.

IV Faith and Conviction of Sin

(a) *The role of conviction of sin*

The Puritans believed that the Law of God was to be preached with the aim of exposing men’s sins and sinfulness, so that they would see their need of Christ (Rom. 3:20, 7:7-13, Mark 10:17-22, Gal. 3:24). So the Larger Catechism tells us

the moral law is of use to all men...to convince them of their disability to keep it, and of the sinful pollution of their nature, hearts, and lives; to humble them in the sense of their sin and misery, and thereby help them to a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and of the perfection of His obedience. (A.95)

(b) *“Common Operations of the Spirit”*

This phrase appears in the Westminster Confession (X/IV) and the Larger Catechism (A.68). Among these common operations of the Spirit must be included conviction of sin. The Puritans did not believe that conviction of sin guaranteed ultimate conversion (L/C An. 95 quoted above refers to “all men”). The Heidelberg Catechism is not so clear on this point since it uses the first person and is framed in terms of what the people of God profess for themselves. Thus it states that the commandments are to be strictly preached “that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission

of sin and righteousness in Christ ...” (An. 115).

The Westminster Divines, however, clearly allowed for men like Felix who trembled and King Saul who said “I have sinned” but who were never regenerated by the Spirit. The Directory for Public Worship includes in sins to be confessed the fact of having sinned “more presumptuously, against the light of our minds, checks of our consciences and motions of the Holy Spirit to the contrary”⁸

(c) *Hanko’s Objection*

On the phrase “common operations of the Spirit” in the Confession, Professor Hanko writes, “It is possible that they refer to the fact, common in Puritan teaching, that the preaching of the Law can, and usually does, have some kind of influence upon the unregenerate hearer so that he is able to see his sin, even to sorrow to some extent for it, show an interest in Christ as the One through whom he can escape from sin, and even have a certain longing for the blessedness of which the Gospel speaks....If this is indeed true, this idea is condemned in the Canons in 3 & 4/B4.”⁹

(d) *The Canons of Dort*

When we turn to Professor Hanko’s reference in the Canons of Dort we read, “Moreover, to hunger and thirst after deliverance from misery, and after life, and to offer unto God the sacrifice of a broken spirit is peculiar to the regenerate and those that are called blessed” (Canons 3 & 4/B4). Surely we must distinguish between desiring happiness and desiring Christ as the source of happiness. To put it differently, the unregenerate may desire to be delivered from Hell as the consequence of sin, without desiring to depart from sin itself. So, in Isaiah 55:1-3, there are those who are described as thirsty who seek the satisfaction of that thirst in something other than Christ. This distinction is recognised in the Belgic Confession.¹⁰

(e) *Conviction of sin in the elect*

In the case of the elect, this conviction of sin is at some point accompanied by the renewing of the heart and will so that faith in Christ results. The subjective extent of that conviction varies, as examples from Church history such as John Newton and John Bunyan illustrate, but it is always sufficient to cause complete self-despair and abandonment of all hope in

one's own righteousness; "...being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself, and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition..." (L/C. An. 72).

Practical point: The Law of God is to be fully preached with the aim of sinners seeing their guilt and liability to damnation and their need of Christ, but such conviction does not guarantee ultimate conversion to Christ.

V Faith and the Covenant

(a) *The Covenant Unconditional and Conditional*

According to the Confession, the Covenant entails unconditional promises concerning the elect and conditional promises to all who hear the Word.

Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that Covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit to make them willing, and able to believe (WCF VII/III).

(b) *Hoeksema and Hanko*

Hoeksema explicitly rejects any idea of condition in the Covenant and criticises this section of the Confession in a pamphlet 'The Covenant: God's Tabernacle with Men'.¹¹ Elsewhere he states,

This, too, is often alleged. God saves and justifies us on condition that we believe. Superficially considered, it might seem as if there were truth in this assertion. Is it not true that we must believe in order to be saved? If we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be justified: if not, we shall be damned. It appears that justification is conditioned by faith - yet this cannot be the relation.¹²

A split occurred in the Protestant Reformed Churches about just this point.¹³

Hanko, whilst conceding that the Westminster Confession is a good Reformed Confession on the whole, nevertheless says, “Because the Puritans possessed a defective view of the Covenant, religious experience was to them a crucial aspect of salvation”.¹⁴

For these men, the idea of condition is necessarily Arminian. Assurances that it is a condition that only the elect are able to fulfil by the efficacious work of the Holy Spirit are of no avail. But does the idea of condition and the use of the word “if” imply any uncertainty as to the fulfilment of the Divine decrees? Surely not. God’s decrees are certain of fulfilment not only in the outcome of the preaching of the Gospel but also in whatsoever comes to pass. When you are told “If you go to the dining room at 6 o’clock you will get your tea,” this conditional statement does not cast doubt on the certainty of God’s providence as to who will go to the dining room at 6 and get tea. Condition does not imply uncertainty of outcome as far as the plan of God is concerned, though that outcome is unknown to us.

(c) *UK Developments*

Recently, the newly-formed British Reformed Fellowship, which follows Hoeksema’s teaching, produced a leaflet claiming strict adherence to the Westminster Standards and yet stating, “The BRF denies that faith is a condition of the Covenant”.¹⁵ This really will not do. Apart from the section of the Confession quoted above, the Larger Catechism goes even further.

The grace of God is manifested in the second Covenant, in that He freely provideth and offereth to sinners a Mediator, and life and salvation by Him, and requiring faith *as the condition to interest them in Him* promiseth and giveth his Holy Spirit to all His elect to work in them that faith... (L.C. An.32).

Samuel Rutherford, one of the most ardent defenders of strict Calvinism in the Westminster Assembly declares,

The condition of the Covenant is faith: holiness and sanctification are the condition of Covenanters... *This do* was the condition of the Covenant of Works. *This believe* is the condition of this Covenant...¹⁶

Practical point: It does not cast any doubt upon the firmness of God's decrees of election and reprobation to say to sinners, "If you believe you will be saved, if you do not you will be damned". We may and must remonstrate with them in this way. "For He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart..." (Ps. 95:7-8).

VI Faith and Repentance

"By it a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature, and righteous law of God; and upon the apprehension of His mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavouring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments. Although repentance be not to be rested in, as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God's free grace in Christ, yet it is of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it." (WCF XV/II & III).

(a) The Theological Connection

None may expect pardon without repentance, because there can be no saving faith without repentance (Acts 20:21). Both are the inevitable results of regeneration. They are the opposite sides of the same thing. Dependence upon Christ must involve turning from that desire for independence from God which is the essence of sin. (Gen. 3:5).

(b) Remorse and Repentance

Our Confession teaches that mere fear of the consequences of sin is not repentance. There must be an actual hatred of sin as sin against God. The demons can tremble at the thought of the consequences of sin, but remain demons. The Belgic Confession similarly states that the unbeliever "can never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love and fear of damnation" (XXIV).

John Whitecross in his "Shorter Catechism Illustrated" mentions a minister who laboured much among the sick for 40 years. Of 2,000 people

who seemed near death, professed faith, and then recovered, only 2 showed in the time following evidence of a genuine saving change.¹⁷ Here in Northern Ireland, there are a great many people who will claim to have been saved perhaps 10 years ago and to have been backslidden for 9 years 11 months or something of that order. Others tell themselves that they can say a “wee prayer” after a life of sin and all will be well. Ministers add to this wrong impression by asking the dying to say a prayer and then confidently asserting that all was well in the end. That sinners can be saved at the 11th hour is not to be doubted, but that they invariably are just because they agreed to say a prayer is another matter. The Gospel should not be reduced to a mere insurance policy to be signed just to be on the safe side. We need to get away from this process-conversion approach that, in the case of the very ill, can seem more like Rome’s last rites than biblical evangelism. Two things account for much of this superficiality. One is Arminianism which sees conversion as something that can be done like flicking a switch without a sovereign work of the Spirit. The other is the absence of the doctrine of repentance, which leads people to think that a mere profession of faith motivated by nothing but fear and self-interest is enough.

(c) *The Experimental Connection*

Our Confession links repentance to the “apprehension of God’s mercy in Christ to such as are penitent”. We must preach the doctrine of repentance and show the necessity of it. Nevertheless, on its own, this can only show need. Men will never repent in isolation from the Gospel of grace.

Only as Christ is “set forth evidently crucified among them” (Gal.3:1) will sinners “gather courage to repent”, to use a phrase of Calvin’s. The prodigal son grossly underestimated the warmth of the welcome he would receive, but he did anticipate some kind of reception.

Practical points:

1. Repentance must be preached if the true concept of conversion is to be understood. There is no such thing as having Christ as our Saviour without acknowledging His Lordship.
2. We must not withhold or be too sparing with the positive promises

of the Gospel when facing even hard-hearted sinners. They will never repent first so as to be somehow more worthy of the Gospel being preached to them. No sinner deserves the Gospel, but no sinner will ever repent of his sins without the promises of mercy. He must look upon Him who was pierced.

VII The Warrant of Faith

This term was used among the Puritans and others since to describe the God-given grounds on which a sinner may regard the biblical invitations to trust in Christ as held out to him.

(a) *Wrong concepts of the Warrant of Faith*

(i) Supposed knowledge of our election

The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men, attending to *the will of God revealed in His word*, and yielding obedience thereunto may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election (WCF III/VIII).

Non-Christians are not to be sent on a mystical wild-goose chase to find out if they are elect by way of some personal, special revelation. Effectual calling and its effects are the only evidence whereby we can know we are of the elect of God (II Pet. 1:10, I Thess 1:4-6).

To quote Samuel Rutherford again,

God's decree of election or His intention to save me, is not the proper object of my faith, but rather of my sense and feeling; we go mightily beside the line in the method of believing when we go to believe at first God's intention to save me. The order is, being humbled for sin, we are to adhere to the goodness of the promise, not to look to His intention to persons, but to His complacency and tenderness of heart to all humble sinners; so Paul, I Tim. 1:15, embraceth by all means that good and faithful saying, Jesus Christ came to save sinners; before he put himself in as the first of these sinners, as the condemned man believeth first the King's grace and clemency to all humbled supplicants, who sue for grace, before he

believe grace to himself; and if this were not, the method of applying Christ were unreasonable..... Christ holdeth forth his rope to drowned and lost sinners, and layeth out an open market of the rich treasures of heaven; do thou take it for granted, without any further dispute, as a principle after to be made good, that Christ hath thoughts of grace and peace concerning thee, and do but now husband well the grace offered, lay hold on Christ, ay while he put thee away from Him, and if there be any question concerning God's intention of saving thee, let Christ first move the doubt, but do not thou be the first mover.¹⁸

(ii) Supposed knowledge of ourselves as the objects of Christ's atoning death.

“Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ... Neither are any other redeemed by Christ...” (WCF III/VI). Universal atonement was discussed by the Westminster Assembly and rejected. If we cannot know that we are of the elect prior to conversion, then we cannot know that Christ died for us personally prior to conversion either. The concept of telling the unconverted “Christ died for you” is not consistent with the Confession and the apostles did not do it, though they did preach Christ as the One able to save all sinners who come to Him.

(iii) Conviction of Sin

The Puritans carefully distinguished between the “way of faith” and the “warrant of faith”. Conviction of sin is necessary to come to faith in Christ, but it is not a necessary warrant to regarding the Gospel invitation as addressed to oneself. As John MacLeod put it

It is true that it is only the convinced sinner that will prize the Gospel, but to be convinced that one is a lost and ruined sinner to whom Christ is held out, one does not need to be convinced that he is a truly convinced sinner.¹⁹

(b) *The warrant of faith is the free offer of the Gospel addressed to sinners as such*

“...wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ” (WCF VII/III). The term ‘offer’ or ‘free offer’ also appears in the Catechisms (Larger An. 32, 63 and 68, Shorter An. 31 and 86). The usage

in An. 68 of the Larger is of special interest in that it puts beyond all doubt that the offer is addressed to non-elect sinners; "... who, for their wilful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them, being justly left in their unbelief, do never truly come to Christ". The term 'offer' also appears in the Three Forms of Unity²⁰.

(c) *The Meaning of 'offer'*

Professor Hanko maintains that the term 'offer' can mean no more than 'to exhibit' or 'to present'. He suggests that this was the intended meaning not only in the Three Forms of Unity but also in the Westminster Standards.²¹ It is more customary to regard the term as implying a gracious overture of mercy, an invitation to sinners in general which reflects God's favour and kindness to all who hear the Gospel, a favour and kindness which is one part of what became known later as 'common grace'. Hoeksema's and Hanko's denial of the doctrine of common grace in general and the concept of a gracious overture in particular raises serious questions.

(i) The Person of Christ

If the anti-common grace position were correct, then Christ as God in no sense loved the reprobate even while they were in this world. As a man 'made under the law' the command, "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" applied to Christ. Only two options are open. The first is an heretical division of the person of Christ, by maintaining that Christ loved only the elect in His divine nature but loved all men in His human nature. Clearly this must be rejected. The alternative is to say that Christ, in both natures, loved the elect only and that our obligation to love all men is due to our ignorance of who the elect are. This means that we are required to love those whom God does not. Moreover, Scripture bases our obligation to love all men not on our ignorance of God's mind, but the knowledge of it that we should have and our duty to be patterned after Him (Matt. 5:43-48).

(ii) The Preaching of the Gospel

Are we to have compassion on all those to whom we preach reflecting our concern for their spiritual welfare (Rom. 9:1-3 and 10:1)? If so, do we express this compassion as ministers of Christ, acting "in Christ's stead" (2 Cor. 5:20), or do we cease to act in that capacity at this point?

We submit that the tears of Christ over Jerusalem were the human tears of a Divine person and reflected divine compassion and that the Scriptures warrant the preaching of a gracious overture of mercy to all who hear the Gospel. We also submit that this was the overall position of the Westminster Divines. In support of this we offer the following five lines of evidence.

Firstly, the Minutes of the Assembly.

“Resolved upon the Q., These two questions and answers, Q. Do all men equally partake of the benefits of Christ? A. Although from Christ some common favours redound to all mankind, and some special privileges to the visible Church, yet none partake of the principal benefits of His mediation but only such as are members of the Church invisible. Q. What common favours redound from Christ to all mankind? A. Besides much forbearance and many supplies for this life, which all mankind receive from Christ as Lord of all, they by Him are made capable of having salvation tendered to them by the Gospel, and are under such dispensations of providence and operations of the Spirit as lead to repentance.”²²

“Ordered - Q. Are all they saved by Christ who live within the Visible Church and hear the Gospel? A. Although the Visible Church (which is a society made up of such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children) do enjoy many special favours and privileges whereby it is distinguished from other societies in the world and the Gospel where it cometh doth tender salvation by Christ to all, testifying that whosoever believes in Him shall be saved, and excludeth none that come unto Him; yet none do or can truly come unto Christ, or are saved by Him, but only the members of the Invisible Church, which is the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one unto Christ their head”.²³

“Resolved upon the Q. ‘Q. What is it to believe in Christ? A. To believe in Christ is to receive Christ according to God’s offer, resting on Him alone for pardon and all grace and salvation.’ Resolved upon the Q. ‘Q. What ground or warrant have you, being a sinner, to believe in Christ? A. The ground of my believing in Christ is God’s offer of Him in His word to me as well as to any other man, and His commanding me to believe in Him, as well as to believe or obey any other thing in His word’.”²⁴

Secondly, the Directory for Public Worship.

In the prayer before sermon in this Directory which the Westminster Assembly produced, we read “Yea, not only despising the riches of God’s goodness, forbearance and longsuffering, but standing out against many invitations and offers of grace in the Gospel...”

Thirdly, the use of the term ‘goodness’ in the Shorter Catechism.

God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth (S/C Ans. 4).

That God shows goodness to all men can scarcely be denied (e.g. Rom. 2:4, Ps. 145:9). The question is whether “goodness” or “doing good” implies Divine favour or lovingkindness. Hoeksema, having acknowledged that goodness sometimes indicates mercy, grace and compassion, goes on to say, “Nevertheless, it should never be forgotten that this benevolence of God is not common, and that it may not and cannot be separated from His goodness as perfection. Only as the ethically perfect One is God the benevolent One. And because this is true, His goodness reveals itself as wrath and anger, as a consuming fire, to those that love iniquity.”²⁵

By applying this sense of “goodness” to God’s dealings with His creatures, the way is open to evacuate all reference to God’s goodness towards men in general of the idea of benevolence, mercy, grace and kindness, except in the case of the elect who, because of their supposed justification from eternity past are at no point among “those that love iniquity” in the sight of God, even though they do love iniquity prior to their effectual call. John Murray on Romans 2:4 comments,

It needs to be noted that the apostle does not think of this restraint as exercised in abstraction from the riches of God’s goodness, the riches of his benignity and lovingkindness... It is a metallic conception of God’s forbearance and longsuffering that isolates them from the kindness of disposition and of benefaction which the goodness of God implies.²⁶

When we turn to the Westminster Standards, we find the term ‘goodness’ in An. 4 of the Shorter Catechism replaces the terms “most loving, gracious, merciful, longsuffering, abundant in goodness...” in the Westminster Confession (II/I) and the Larger Catechism (An. 7). The Shorter Catechism has sometimes been criticised for not mentioning God’s grace or love in An. 4, but we must realize that whatever differences there may

be in these various terms, the Westminster Divines saw God's goodness as a basic umbrella term for them. This being so, since God is undoubtedly good to all, we submit that the Westminster Divines as a whole held to what became known as the doctrine of common grace in the sense that the Lord, in a variety of ways, displays His favour and lovingkindness even to the non-elect in this present life, without being pleased to regenerate them. The preaching of the Gospel and the overture of mercy which it includes is one part of that display of lovingkindness.

Fourthly, individual Assembly members.

Rutherford says, "He offereth in the Gospel, life to all..." He then calls this

God's moral complacency of grace, revealing an obligation that all are to believe if they would be saved; and upon their own peril be it, if they refuse Christ... Christ cometh once with good tidings to all, elect and reprobate²⁷

Thomas Goodwin states "God now in this life offers to deal with thee upon terms of friendship..."²⁸ and speaks of "an invitation to come into the Ark, like to Christ's inviting sinners to come unto Him."²⁹

In 1657, a series of free offer sermons by Obadiah Sedgwick was published³⁰. Jeremiah Burrows wrote a recommendation to Edward Fisher's "Marrow of Modern Divinity" which featured so much in the defence of the free offer in later Scottish Church history.³¹

If time permitted, so far as the members of the Assembly have left their views on record, we believe it could be shown that the free offer position was the norm among them.

Fifthly, the Puritan period in general.

The free offer or gracious overture position seems to have been held generally among the 17th century Puritans with little dissent. John Flavel preached a series of free offer sermons.³² John Owen has a relevant sermon on "a vision of unchangeable free mercy, in sending the means of grace to undeserving sinners".³³ Errol Hulse in his useful booklet on the subject gives appropriate quotations from Brookes, Charnock, Sibbes etc.³⁴

In Scotland, William Guthrie in his “Christian’s Great Interest,” published in 1658, makes references throughout to “gracious invitations” etc.³⁵ David Dickson and James Durham, around 1650, wrote their “Sum of Saving Knowledge” which is often printed with the Westminster Standards in Scottish editions. It has a whole section on “warrants to believe” and includes a treatment of Isaiah 55:1-5, saying that the Lord “maketh open offer of Christ and His grace by proclamation of a free and gracious market of righteousness....He inviteth all sinners...” On 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; “...The earnest request that God maketh to us to be reconciled to Him in Christ...”³⁶ That whole section is worthy of study.

Taking all this into account, we feel justified in concluding that the Westminster divines meant more than Professor Hanko suggests in their use of the term “offer”. It should be said in fairness, that neither Hoeksema nor Hanko deny the command to repent and believe or man’s responsibility to obey. Nevertheless, the Westminster divines and the Puritans went further than merely issuing the command. They besought men and did so as an expression of divine lovingkindness.

(d) *John Calvin*

From time to time the charge has been made that the Westminster Standards represent a significant departure from the position of Calvin. Usually, the charge is in the form that the Westminster position is more rigorously Calvinistic than Calvin. However, occasionally, the accusation is in the other direction. Were the Westminster divines at odds with Calvin in their view of the free offer of the Gospel? We suggest not. The following are samples from Calvin’s commentaries.

On Acts 13:46

He accuseth them (the Jews) of unthankfulness, because, whereas they were chosen by God out of all people, that Christ might offer himself unto them, they refused so great a benefit maliciously....because they do so willingly cast from them so great a grace³⁷

On Heb. 2:12

Hence we conclude that the Gospel is offered to us for this end, that

it may lead us to the knowledge of God by which His goodness is made known among us....This is what Paul says (2 Cor. 5:20) that he and others act as the ambassadors of Christ and exhort us in the name of Christ”³⁸

On Heb. 3:13,

The particle ‘so long as’ implies that the opportunity will not always be there if we have been slow to follow when God was calling us. God is now knocking at our door. If we do not open to Him, it will come about that in turn He will close the door of His kingdom to us. Then those who despised the grace offered today will find their groans are too late. Therefore, since we do not know whether it is God’s will to continue His call into tomorrow, let us not put off. He calls today; let us answer as soon as possible.³⁹

On 2 Pet. 3:9, Calvin does not restrict the phrase “not willing that any should perish” to the elect. Rather he says

This is His wondrous love towards the human race, that He desires all men to be saved, and is prepared to bring even the perishing to safety. We must notice the order, that God is prepared to receive all men into repentance, so that none may perish. These words indicate the means of obtaining salvation, and whoever of us seeks salvation must learn to follow in this way. It could be asked here, if God does not want any to perish, why do so many in fact perish? My reply is that no mention is made here of the secret decree of God by which the wicked are doomed to their own ruin, but only of His lovingkindness as it is made known to us in the Gospel. There God stretches out His hand to all alike, but He only grasps those (in such a way as to lead to Himself) whom He has chosen before the foundation of the world.⁴⁰

Practical points:

1. We are to treat non-Christians as recipients of divine favours, including material blessings and gifts as well as the preaching of the Gospel. It is because they are real blessings (Gen. 17:20) that their ingratitude renders them so guilty. Unthankfulness relates to blessings not curses (Rom. 1:21). The fact that, in the case of the reprobate, these blessings become the occasion of greater guilt in accordance with the decree of God, does not mean that they are not in themselves expressions

of the free favour and mercy of God. We can therefore point out to the unbeliever that God has been merciful to him and the danger of abusing His mercies and “treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath” (Rom 2:5)

2. We must do more than issue the Gospel command. We must exhort men to come to Christ, not in a “take it or leave it” fashion, but conveying to them that it is a matter of intense concern to us that they heed God’s sovereign and gracious overture of mercy and embrace in faith the Saviour whom they so much need. (There should be no confusion that it is they who need Christ and not vice versa as is sometimes the case in the Arminian presentation today.)

General Conclusions

(i) The anti-Common Grace School.

Herman Hoeksema was undoubtedly a great theologian, nevertheless, his distinctive views are significantly at variance with the Westminster Standards. The root of the problem seems to be a misapplication of the doctrine of the immutability of God. Hence, the elect can never be really under condemnation prior to effectual calling. Similarly, God cannot show grace or favour to the reprobate in this life since He does not in the next. (This view, though held to defend the doctrine of God’s sovereignty, actually sets limits upon that sovereignty by saying that God’s grace or favour must be unto eternity or nothing, whereas if He is free to show mercy as and when and how He pleases, He may indeed show favour to the non-elect for a time in this life and withdraw that favour in the eternal world). Finally, the concept of condition is seen as casting doubt upon the immutability of God’s decrees.

As we have seen, the Westminster Assembly did not share any of these conclusions, though they certainly held that God and His decrees were unchangeable.

(ii) The Precision of the Westminster Standards

They are constructed in a way that clearly states the truth and excludes a multitude of errors. They are eminently suited to help us guard the Gospel

(2 Tim. 1:13-14). How foolish to neglect them and how misguided for new churches to “start from scratch” by writing their own statements of faith as if the Lord has not given His church teachers in the past who can help us in the present.

(iii) The preaching of the Gospel.

The Calvinism of the Westminster Standards is clear-cut. Yet, there is nothing in them that encourages a laid back or complacent approach to the preaching of the Gospel. We are to address non-Christians as those who are living under God’s wrath. The law is to be preached to expose real guilt and they are to be earnestly pleaded with to flee from the wrath to come. They must hear that God, from the throne of His glory, is pleased to send them a gracious invitation of mercy because He is “ready to forgive” (Ps. 86:5) and that Christ is able to save them and through His servants compassionately invites them to come to Him. We must preach with urgency and “travail in birth till Christ be formed” in them (Gal. 4:19).

We close with a quotation from a Covenanter, Richard Cameron, to illustrate the preaching of our forefathers in the faith:

But I say, our Lord is here this day, saying, ‘Will ye take me, ye that have had a lie so long in your right hand?’ What say ye to it? You that have been plagued with deadness, hardness of heart, and unbelief, He is now requiring you to give in your answer. What say ye? Yes or no? What think ye of the offer? And what fault find ye in Him? There may be some saying, ‘If I get or take Him I shall get a cross also.’ Well, that is true; but ye will get a sweet cross. Thus we offer Him unto you in the parishes of Auchinleck, Douglas, Crawfordjohn, and all ye that live thereabout. And what say ye? Will ye take Him? Tell us what ye say, for we take instruments before these hills and mountains around us, that we have offered Him unto you this day. Ye that are free of cess paying, will ye take Him? Ye that are free of the Bond now tendered by the enemies, will ye accept of Him this day, when the old professors are taking offence at His way and cross? Oh! will you cast your eyes upon Him? Angels are wondering at this offer. They stand beholding with admiration that our Lord is giving you such an offer this day. Oh come, come then unto Him, and there shall never be more of your by-past sins, they shall be buried. But if ye will not come unto Him, ‘it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for you.’ Now, what say ye to me? And what shall I say to Him that sent me

unto you? Shall I say, 'Lord, there are some yonder saying, I am content to give Christ my heart, hand, house, lands, and all I have for His cause.' 'If ye can make a better bargain, then do it. Look over to the Shawhead and these hills, and take a look of them, for they are all witnesses now, and when you are dying they shall all come before your face. We take everyone of you witness against the other, and will not that aggravate your sorrow when they come into your mind and conscience, saying, 'We heard you invited and obtested to take Christ, and we were witnesses; and yet ye would not! And now we come in here as witnesses against you?' There is some tenderness amongst you now, and that is favourable-like to look upon. But yet that is not all. The angels will go up and report at the throne what is everyone's choice this day. They will go up to heaven and report good news, and thus they will say, 'There were some in the parishes of Auchinleck, Douglas, and Crawfordjohn that were receiving our Lord in the offers of the Gospel, and He is become their Lord,' and this will be welcome news.⁴¹

This is biblical and Reformed Westminster Confession orthodoxy. May the Lord enable us to be faithful in these things.

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DAVID BATES AND THE COVENANTERS OF JEMSEG

by Eldon Hay

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In 1834 the Reformed Presbyterian Home and Missionary Society reported to the Irish Synod making mention of two ministers and two catechists serving in the British North American colonies: “the ministers are Rev. Alexander Clarke, of Amherst,¹ and Rev. William Sommerville, of Horton²...the catechists are Messrs. Andrew Stephenson³ and David Bates.”⁴ This article is largely about David Bates, the last named and least known of the four.

Coming out to the British colonies in 1831, Andrew Stevenson worked as a school master in Jemseg, New Brunswick. He wrote a long letter about his experiences, concluding with “I advise the Society to encourage married men to come out.”⁵ Stevenson then left Jemseg early in 1833. Accepting Stevenson’s counsel, “the Irish Synod now sent out David Bates, a ruling elder, who settled at Jemseg.”⁶

Early Days in Ireland

David Bates was born at Donaghadee, County Down, Northern Ireland, in 1801. Family tradition tells us that

David Bates’s left arm was withered somewhat... It was said that as a very young man (in Ireland), he fell off a wagon and hurt his arm. David’s immediate family - his parents and brothers and sisters - were farmers. But his withered arm meant that David was to be trained to do something else. He was thus trained for teaching. He went to some school or institute or college in Ireland.⁷

His wife Margaret Glen Bates was born in the same community some 16 years earlier, about 1784.⁸ The couple had four children, probably all

born in the same community of Donaghadee: James (1821-1896), Robert (1824-1907), William (1826-1898) and Mary King Bates (1828-1902).⁹ We know very little about David Bates's education directly, though it is almost certain (from the process surrounding his Jemseg predecessor Andrew Stevenson) that he had a good classical training, was a school teacher and a ruling elder in the Reformed Presbyterian church. Whereas Stevenson came out from Ireland as a single man, David Bates was married and had four children when he came to Saint John in late 1832 or early 1833; for we hear of David Bates in the 1833 RP Irish Synod minutes, the Missionary Board reporting "David Bates formerly of Castle Mellon (County Tyrone)¹⁰ has been engaged by the Directors as another Catechist for Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and has emigrated, the Board making him an allowance for his outfit."¹¹ Family tradition holds that "the Bates's had a long trip on the crossing- they were something like six (or eight) weeks on the ocean."¹²

School Master, Catechist and Elder

Undoubtedly David Bates took over Andrew Stevenson's mantle as school master and Covenanter catechist in the community.¹³ We do not have any word from Bates as to what teaching was like in those early days; although one of Stevenson's letters survives, written from Jemseg, 7 November 1832.¹⁴

David Bates apparently wrote very little. In 1835 the Irish RP Missionary Society reported that we "have had no communication whatever since he left this country."¹⁵ A couple of years later, in 1837, the Irish RP Mission Society had heard from Bates, who had sent one communication. In its report the Mission Society noted that

David Bates... has been engaged in teaching, for a considerable time, and he (Bates) states, that he has made it a principal concern to instruct his pupils in the Sacred Scriptures, and in the Assembly's Shorter Catechism; and that both in the Daily school, and in the Sabbath school, he had witnessed some gratifying cases of the progress of Divine truth, among those committed to his care.¹⁶

The Bates family formed the nucleus of a small Covenanter community. In 1835, the Bates's were

joined by the family of William Dougal, and they constituted a society, and occasionally had preaching. In 1836, Samuel Brown, and, in 1839, his father, John Brown, with a large family, joined the Jemseg society. Still later in 1839, Mr. Dougal¹⁷ removed to St. John, but at the same time the society was augmented by John Glenn and family.¹⁸

David Bates and his family drop from our view for the next few years - from 1837 until 1841. Although not a part of the family tradition, a reliable source indicates that "David Bates removed his family to St. John, in 1841."¹⁹ Did he go there to teach school? We simply do not know. While in St. John, David Bates was elected and ordained an elder in the Saint John RP congregation.²⁰ Yet shortly after his ordination, Mr. Bates "returned (with his family) to his former residence at the Jemseg"²¹ in 1847.²² After they returned to Jemseg, David never left the community again.

There is every reason to think that David Bates was a good teacher. Robert Hawkes tells us that "David Bates was reported as having taught several years before receiving (his) first license (in New Brunswick)."²³ Family tradition has retained one reminiscence about his licensing:

Bates had to go to Fredericton or Saint John to be examined by a board. He did. When the board was finished putting their questions to David Bates; he said he wanted to put some questions to members of the Board. He proceeded to do so - in Latin. The dumbfounded Board members couldn't answer. Apparently, after that, there was little question about (David) Bates's capacity to teach.²⁴

Family tradition holds that besides school teaching, the Bates's owned a farm, undoubtedly to supplement the meagre income of a school teacher; and to support the family after David Bates's teaching days were finished.

Society Meetings Commenced

As we have seen, the Bates family, together with a few others, organised themselves into a society, as early as 1835,²⁵ and had occasional preaching. The society meetings "were held every Sabbath day and Wednesday evenings, and were often attended by the neighbours."²⁶ What was a society meeting? "A Covenanter...society is a meeting for the public worship of God, held on Sabbath by the elders and members of the church when

deprived of the preaching of a minister.”²⁷ There never was a settled Covenanter minister in Jemseg. So Covenanters there had to be content with occasional preachers. The occasional preachers may have been Rev. Alexander Clarke (1794-1874), the original RP missionary.²⁸ Or Rev. William Sommerville (1800-1878), who came out from Ireland with Andrew Stevenson in 1831, worked in New Brunswick for two years before settling finally in Horton in the Annapolis valley, where he lived until his death in 1878.²⁹ He would certainly know of the Jemseg community, and may have come there very infrequently. Another possibility is Rev. Alexander Stuart (or Stewart) (1832-1897), who came out from Ireland in 1847, was licensed by the New Brunswick and Nova Scotia Presbytery that same year.³⁰ He itinerated in New Brunswick for some three years, before leaving the area entirely.³¹ Clarke, Sommerville and Stewart may have come to the community; there is direct evidence that Rev. Lawson did.

Rev. James Reid Lawson (1820-1891) came to Southstream (later Barnesville) in 1845, and with the exception of a year in Boston in the late 1850s, lived in that community until his death in 1891; although his last years were marked by increased infirmity. (He married Margaret Hastings of Saint John in 1855). Lawson made missionary trips outside Barnesville, and Jemseg was one of these communities, though it is rarely spoken of directly.³² The first specific mention occurs in 1861 when Lawson himself writes: “I have recently entered into an arrangement...to preach every sixth Sabbath at Jemseg, on the river St. John, a distance of some 40 miles from my residence. There are only two families there in connection with the church; but there are others who are favourable, and, with apparent gladness hear the word.”³³

It is obvious that the Covenanter society in Jemseg was never large, and that the Bates's were the central family involved. As to the upbringing of Bates's children, family tradition holds that David and Margaret Bates, as parents, provided “a strict and firm upbringing, there's no suggestion of any cruelty...David Bates was kind of a stubborn man.”³⁴ The Covenanters never built a church in Jemseg, using homes, or later, a union church. The graves of the original couple, David Bates and his wife Margaret are in the cemetery of St. James Anglican in Lower Jemseg, as well as the graves of the other members of the Bates family. No obituaries of the older members of the Bates family have been found, though there were death-noticees for David Bates.³⁵

Of the four Bates children, James, the eldest never married. Robert, the second son, married a widow, Sarah Dykeman Coy (1831-1900) in 1863,³⁶ and the marriage was childless.³⁷ The youngest and only daughter Mary King Bates, married William Glenn on 19 October 1864. The couple were married at the Bates's home by Rev. James Reid Lawson.³⁸ A year later, William Glen, but 35 years of age, died.³⁹ William Glen left a pregnant wife who later gave birth to Annie King Glenn (1865-1941), who though growing to adulthood and marrying, died childless. The third child and youngest son, William Bates married Priscilla Van Wart in 1877, the marriage in Saint John again conducted by Rev. James R. Lawson.⁴⁰ William Bates and Priscilla Van Wart were to have six children; and it is from this son that Robert Sharp and Rosemary Wasson have descended.

Support for Bible Society

Writing in 1895, after both the senior couple - David Bates and his wife Margaret Bates - had died, all four adult children were alive in Jemseg, scholar W.M. Glasgow noted that "Robert Bates, with his sister, Mrs. Mary K. Glenn, live at...Jemseg, and still represent the Covenanter Church in that section."⁴¹ James is not mentioned; nor is William. Yet all the Bates family supported the Cambridge Branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society (New Brunswick). In fact, the one certain piece of writing by David Bates comes from a time ca. 1872, when Bates was secretary of the Cambridge Auxiliary. He drafted a note sent to all the collectors in the Cambridge district:

To _____ As the more efficient Branches of the N.B. Auxiliary take up their subscriptions for the B(ible) S(ociety) previous to the time of holding their annual meetings - the President and managers of the Cambridge Branch think proper to follow their example and request you to collect within the limits of your district - passing by nothing available however small - and when collected please place in the hands of the treasurer C.L. Slip, the Subscription list and sum completed before the 20 Dec., and so oblige

Yours respectfully, D(avid) B(ates).⁴²

In the 1880 Bible Society report, David Bates was listed as a Vice-President of the Branch; among the contributors were David Bates, James Bates, William Bates, Mrs. William Bates, Mrs. W(illiam) Glenn.⁴³

The Covenanter community in Jemseg died out in the early 1900s. Robert's wife died in 1900, the widow Mary Bates Glenn died in 1902, and Robert Bates in 1907. By the time of his death, Robert Bates was a member of the Saint John congregation, indeed, his membership may have been in that congregation for some time. Robert Bates's tombstone reads: "Staunch & Strong/ Upright & Downright/ Scorning Wrong." At the time of Robert Bates's death, the R.P minister then in Saint John, Rev. James Thompson Mitchell, came to Jemseg. The Covenanter newspaper noted that ;

Mr. Robt. Bates, a member of the St. John congregation, residing at Upper Jemseg, died on Monday, July 29 (1907), aged eighty three. The funeral service Wednesday afternoon was conducted by the pastor. His most fitting memorial was his fine character and the warm respect and admiration of a large circle of friends and acquaintances. His legacy of one thousand dollars to St. John (Covenanter) congregation and another thousand to Barnesville (Covenanter) congregation, was characteristic of the man, for he was ever a cheerful giver. He rests from his labours, but his works follow on.⁴⁴

His is the only obituary I have been able to find. Robert left legacies not only to the two Covenanter churches in Barnesville and Saint John, but also to the Bible Society, and to children of William and Priscilla Bates.⁴⁵ William Bates had died in 1898, a relatively poor man,⁴⁶ his wife died in 1932.

Death and Reminiscences

As already indicated, the Bates family is buried in the Anglican church yard. Why this burial ground? According to family tradition,

at the time of David Bates's death (in 1883), there were two cemeteries in Jemseg - the Anglican and the Methodist. The Methodist cemetery would not take the remains of David Bates; the Methodists and the Covenanters had had some kind of falling out. The Anglicans would - but would not allow a committal service by other than an Anglican clergyperson. Result: David Bates is buried here, but without benefit of a committal service.⁴⁷

Finally, stories and reminiscences about David Bates and family; narrated to me by Robert Sharp and Rosemary Wasson in August 1990. David

Bates was a teacher and a farmer. One night he was coming home in the pitch darkness, and tangled with a skunk. He had to bury his clothes. David Bates was also a strict Sabbatarian. If and when David Bates had a hired man, that man normally went home on a Saturday night. If he did not do so, Bates would not allow him to do so on the Sabbath. Children were not encouraged to look out the windows or to be curious on the Sabbath. It was also said that David Bates would go out on the road on the Sabbath in front of his farm. And if persons were travelling, and had gone over a mile, he would do his best to have them come in and stay until Monday morning. On the Sabbath, the cows were milked before daylight, and again after dark at night. On one occasion, the neighbours noticed something very unusual - a great deal of activity in the Bates household on the Sabbath. Reason? A grandchild was born to the Bates that day.

Margaret Bates, the wife, was a good deal older than David. Few stories have come down about her. One relates to the fact that apparently at one time there was a Methodist service one Sabbath, a Covenanter the next. When asked about the Methodists having some sort of special service on a Sabbath, Margaret Bates said that she had no difficulty with it, noting as to the Methodists, that "it was their ain day"! Clearly, the Bates household was the home of visiting clergy - largely Rev. James Reid Lawson.

On the largest Bates tombstone in Jemseg, erected by the largesse of Robert, there is this tribute simply entitled "Bates":

The souls of believers are at their death
made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory.
Their bodies being still united to Christ,
do rest in the grave til the resurrection.

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5. "Reformed Presbyterian Home and Foreign Missionary Society," *Covenanter* 3 (January 1833), 72.
6. William Melancthon Glasgow, "Annals of the New Brunswick and Nova Scotia Presbytery," *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter* 33 (May 1895):107.
7. Robert Sharp and Rosemary Bates Wasson, both Bates descendants, Jemseg, N.B., narrated these and other incidents to the author in August, 1990 (hereafter cited as "Bates family tradition").
8. Information from the Robert Bates bible, provided by Rosemary Wasson.
9. Information supplied by Rosemary Wasson.
10. "Castle Mellon is near Bready (close to Strabane) in County Tyrone. 'Castle Mellon' is the correct name in this case; it would not appear as a town like 'Castlemellon.' It is more a district" (letter, Professor F.S. Leahy, to author, 16 November 1992).
11. 'Report of the Missionary Society', "Irish RP Synod Minutes" in *Covenanter* 3 (May 1833): 192-93.
12. Bates family tradition.
13. "Bates, David," in Robert Hawkes, *In Duty Bound: Parish School Teachers of Queens County, New Brunswick, 1818-1837* (Fredericton, 1988), 22-23.
 Licensed: Waterborough 1 Sept 1833 and 5 Oct 1842
 Class 1 Queens County 19 Aug 1848 renewal
 David Bates was reported as having taught several years before receiving the first licence noted above.... He was 43 years old and had been teaching 132 months in the same Waterborough Parish school at the time of the 1844-45 inspection. In 1848 he held a licence to teach in the parish of Waterborough.
 Queens County Teaching Record (by parish) 1818-37:
 Waterborough 1 Sept 1833 1 Sept 1834
 Waterborough 1 Sept 1834 1 Sept 1835
 Waterborough 1 Sept 1836 1 Sept 1837
 Waterborough 1 Sept 1837 1 Sept 1838
 (Also taught in Queens County during 1839-49)
 Hawkes also erroneously reports that David Bates was a member of the Church of Scotland.
14. "Reformed Presbyterian Home & Foreign Mission Society," *Covenanter* 3 (January 1833): 70-72. Virtually the entire letter is reported in author's "The Rev. Andrew Stevenson - Covenanter of three Countries." (*Reformed Theological Journal*, November 1992, p.31).
15. "Abstract of the Seventh Annual Report of the Reformed Presbyterian Home and Foreign Missionary Society," *Covenanter*, n.s., 1 (September 1835): 224.
16. "Ninth Annual Report of the Reformed Presbyterian Home and Foreign Missionary Society: British North American Colonies," *Covenanter*, n.s., 4 (September 1837): 230.
17. Although little is known of the Dougals when they went to Saint John, it is reasonable to suppose the following account refers to Mrs. William Dugall (though the spelling of the last name is slightly different). See 'Obituary of Mrs. William (Isabel) Dugall,' *Covenanter* 6 (July 1837): 228. Mrs. William Dugall died 13 May 1873.
 DIED, Main Street, Portland, on Saturday, 31st May, ISABEL, wife of Mr. WILLIAM DUGALL, in the 84th year of her age. She was the oldest member of the church under the pastoral care of Rev. A.M. Stavely, St. John, N.B. Her pastor writes of her that she died "strong in mind, strong in faith and hope. She and her excellent husband, who still lives, were from Bready congregation. She was nearly related to the late (Rev.) Dr. Bates." Both the deceased and her surviving husband gained for themselves the highest esteem and regard in the land of their adoption, and the news of the death of Mrs. Dugall will have a melancholy interest for friends in her native land.
18. Glasgow, "Annals," 107.
19. *Ibid.*

20. William Melancthon Glasgow, "Reformed Presbyterian Record" (1902, holograph held at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, Penn.) dated Bates's election and ordination in 1845, and then noted that, in 1847 Bates "removed to Jemseg, N.B."
21. "Minutes of the New Brunswick and Nova Scotia Reformed Presbytery," Saint John, N.B., 15 May 1847 (mfm., Maritime Conference United Church Archives, Halifax, N.S.):
 Present - Wm Sommerville Moderator A Stavely Clerk - R. Ewing & J. Agnew - Ruling Elders - After Constitution The Minutes of the former meeting are read and sustained.... Mr. Stavely reports that two persons Mr. Agnew & Mr. Bates were chosen and ordained to the office of the Eldership in St. John congregation ... but that Mr. B. has since returned to his former residence at the Jemseg.
22. Glasgow, "Annals," 107.
23. Hawkes, *In Duty Bound*, 22-23.
24. Bates family tradition.
25. Glasgow, "Annals," 107. The 1835 beginning is much earlier than that related by Marion Gilchrist Reicker, *Those Days are Gone Away* (Queens County Historical Society, 1981), 197.
 A Covenanter Presbyterian Mission was established at Jemseg around 1885. When Rev. William Sommerville came out from Ireland as a pioneer minister in 1831, Mr. Andrew Stevenson accompanied him. Mr. Stevenson went to Jemseg in 1832 and taught school and morality for several years. Elder David Bates came from Ireland, followed in 1835 by William Dougal. These three men constituted the Jemseg session in connection with the Saint John church.
26. Glasgow, "Annals" 107.
27. George Elder, "The Society," *Christian Nation* (New York), 26 August 1903, 12. George Elder was himself a Covenanter who lived at Passekeag, N.B., and attended the Millstream RP community.
28. Clarke may have gone to Jemseg in the years before 1847: in that year, Clarke and the Chignecto congregations were expelled from the Irish Synod, and joined the American (New School) Reformed Presbyterian Synod.
29. See Alexander McLeod Stavely, *The Blessed Dead*, a sermon preached on 6 October 1878 in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Cornwallis, N.S., on occasion of the death of the pastor, Rev. William Sommerville, A.M. with a Biographical Sketch. (Saint John, N.B. and New York, ca. 1878). 48 p. *Canadian Institute of Historical Microreproductions*, 25832.
30. See "Minutes of the New Brunswick and Nova Scotia Reformed Presbytery Meeting," Saint John, N.B., 30 September 1847.
31. He died in the United States in 1897.
32. Jemseg appears to be mentioned indirectly in a (6 August) 1847 letter: "It is only a few days since I returned from visiting a settlement some 40 miles distant, the destitution of which excited my special sympathies" (James R. Lawson, "Letter from Rev. James Lawson," *Monitor and Missionary Chronicle* 1 (October 1847): 133).
33. Quoted in "Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Reformed Presbyterian Home and Foreign Missionary Society: British North American Colonies," 1861, *Covenanter* 5 (July 1861): 181. Jemseg is again directly named in "Colonial Mission Report," *Covenanter* 6 (August 1873), 240; "Mr. Lawson preaches every alternate Sabbath at Barnesville. He preaches also at Black River, Tynemouth, Jemseg, and occasionally at other places."
34. Bates family tradition.
35. 'Death Notice,' *Daily Telegraph* (Saint John), 18 June 1883: "At his residence, Queens County, on Wednesday, 13th inst., Mr. Bates, aged 83 years."
36. *New Brunswick Courier* (Saint John), 24 October 1863: "married 17th inst. by Rev. Samuel Robinson, Robert Bates (to) Miss Sarah M. Coy, both of Cambridge Parish." It ought to read Mrs. Sarah M. Coy, for Robert Bates's wife was a widow. Rev. Samuel Robinson was not a Covenanter minister; probably a Baptist. Mrs.

- Coy's first husband had been the son of a Baptist minister.
37. Moreover, Sarah Dykeman and her first husband had two children, but they both died childless: information supplied by Rosemary Wasson.
 38. *Religious Intelligencer* (Saint John), 28 October 1864.
 39. He died 17 November 1865: *Saint John Globe*, 22 November 1865.
 40. *Watchman* (Saint John), 10 March 1877: "Married in the Waverly Hotel (Saint John) on the 7th inst. by Rev. J.R. Lawson, William Bates to Miss Priscilla Vanwart, both of Cambridge, Queens County."
 41. Glasgow, "Annals," 107.
 42. Written with pencil, but almost certainly by David Bates in the fly-leaf of a book by J.E. Stebbins, *Glory of the Immortal Life* (Norwich, Conn., 1871). Book given to the author by Rosemary Wasson, 7 November 1992. See as well the *Sixty-sixth Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society 1870* (front of book missing), also given to the author by Rosemary Wasson, 7 November 1992, Appendix, p. 44 where there is information about the Cambridge Auxiliary: President, Treasurer, Secretary. The three are, respectively: Leonard Slip, Esq., David Wright, David Bates.
 43. See 'Cambridge Branch, N.B. Auxiliary Bible Society,' *The Sixtieth Report of the New Brunswick Bible Society...at Saint John...with its Branch Societies* (Saint John, N.B., 1880), 56-57.
 44. "Barnesville," *Christian Nation* (New York), 21 August 1907, 11.
 45. The last Will and Testament of Robert Bates was made out in 1903. Original in the possession of Rosemary Wasson.
 46. Queens County Probate Court Files, F10793, mfm., Provincial Archives of New Brunswick.
 47. Bates family tradition. It is to be noted, however, that the first Covenanter buried there would have been William Glenn, who died in 1865.

BOOK REVIEWS

Sent By Jesus : Some Aspects of Christian Ministry Today, D. B. Knox, Banner of Truth, 1992, Hb, 79pp. £5.50.

For those from the Reformed tradition, where the primary task of the pastor is seen as that of preaching the Word, this book is a helpful study of the biblical foundations of such ministry when today many are leaving sound teaching for new and innovative ways of attracting people into their places of worship.

In ten brief chapters Dr. D. Broughton Knox seeks to deal with some areas which are neglected and some which are under debate in the modern church. He begins by showing clearly from Scripture the place of the Christian Ministry as a full time occupation. In doing so Dr. Knox does not deny that every Christian has a ministry in the Church but directs attention to the special ministry to which God will call some men, namely the ministry of the Word and prayer.

From here Dr. Knox goes on to consider Ordination looking at the nature of the Church and the place of Ordination in it. In a natural progression Dr. Knox then gives some thought to the mission of the Church and the whole purpose of the ministry in the world. This leads him to speak about the message which must be proclaimed, a message which is central to this ministry, and the task of the Minister in seeking to be prepared through prayer and study of the Word to declare the truth.

In chapter six Dr. Knox focuses on the need to preach the same gospel as Christ and the apostles preached. The Word that must be sounded forth is 'Repent and believe'. This, he declares, continues to be the need of our day, for there is none other name under heaven whereby we must be saved; none other name than the name of Jesus. It is the centrality of the God-man Who died to save sinners that makes the Gospel unique in this humanistic world.

In chapter eight Dr. Knox deals with the debate on the issue of the masculine terminology and the place of women in the Church. Speaking of the use of masculine terminology Knox says,

If the reason is theological, that is, if it is based on God's attributes and His relation to the world, this is the complete explanation of the consistent biblical usage, and it should control our own usage and thought.

Knox goes on to argue that such is the nature of God and so the reason for such usage is theological. This leads him to the conclusion that the way in which God sets up families and congregations is based on His own nature so men and women have distinct roles and the man exercises headship.

Chapter nine brings Dr. Knox to consider the true meaning of the word 'Church', and he concludes in chapter ten by considering the enemy of the Church, reminding his readers that they have a powerful and spiritual foe and one who can only be properly dealt with by using the powerful weapons given by God, the spiritual weapons of prayer and the preaching of the Word.

Knox seeks to base his conclusions on a right understanding of the Word of God and the example and teaching which is given there. In clear and sometimes thought provoking ways he draws out the lessons of Scripture for our ministry today and seeks to challenge those who would deny the truth.

This is a brief but helpful study of these aspects of Christian ministry and having read the book the impression remains that the surface has been scratched and thoughts provoked which would be rewarded by further deliberation and study.

Edward M. McCollum.

Preachers with Power, Four Stalwarts of the South Douglas Kelly, Banner of Truth Trust 1992, Hb 198pp £9.95

The Reformed church has always vigorously maintained the centrality of preaching. This is seen as the priority set out in Scripture itself. Our Saviour declared that this was His purpose "Let us go somewhere else, to the nearby villages, so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come"

The Westminster Shorter Catechism unequivocally states that preach-

ing lies at the heart of the Church's life and mission. "The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation"

Many in our day lament the decline in preaching and its apparent lack of power. This should be a cause of heart searching to preachers certainly, but also to all the people of God who are to pray for the Divine blessing on the ministry of the Word.

This little book is both a help to preachers and a stimulus to the faith of God's people. The author Douglas Kelly writes as a 'son of the South' but brings lessons which are applicable to every preacher and congregation. The four men of the title ministered in 'one of the richest periods of evangelical history, spanning the years 1791 - 1902'

The introduction gives a fascinating and illuminating insight into "the old South" (The southern states of America beginning in Virginia and running south to Florida and west to Texas) It was in this region that each of the men was nurtured and subsequently ministered.

The author charts the source of spiritual life in the southern states from the seventeenth century to the present. Many of the aspects of life and culture will sound familiar to those living in various areas of the English-speaking world. The author states that "from the late seventeenth century until the 1950s or even 1960s, the south remained an agrarian economy with largely rural values and folkways, shaped by strong elements of evangelical Christianity" In addition he also suggests that "because of their Presbyterian Reformed background, the population tended to be very educationally minded and Biblically very literate."

The rich blessing enjoyed by the southern population are many but the dangers are also real and faithfully identified. The author says that the Southern mind "has tended to engender a certain sense of feeling set apart, if not of superiority which can all too easily degenerate into a kind of narrow provincialism, blind to its own faults."

The four preachers dealt with in the book are Daniel Baker, James Henley Thornwell, Benjamin M Palmer and John L Girardeau.

Daniel Baker spent most of his life as a missionary and itinerant evangelist. He did serve for some time in settled pastorates, the longest being one of nine years. Though Baker was a southerner he had a vision for the whole nation. His preaching was used by God to bring times of refreshing to many communities. One writer summarized the results of Baker's preaching visit to Beaufort in South Carolina like this, "as you walked along the street in the stillness of a summer morning you might hear the united voice of each household ascending in well known hymns of praise to the honour of their great Redeemer."

Baker's travels were extensive and kept him away from his family for long periods at a time. We might question this but God blessed his family life and he saw his children grow up in the faith and two of his sons train for the Gospel ministry. Baker's life was characterized by an untiring zeal for the spread of the Gospel, a deep humility, a faithfulness in time spent in the secret place with the Lord and, according to one of his sons, "an unbroken cheerfulness under the most mysterious and otherwise discouraging providences." These are searching challenges for every preacher as is the observation of a contemporary that "His impatient hearers could not resist the impression that the speaker was their friend."

James Henley Thornwell is described as "a theological preacher." His preaching made the following impression on one of his hearers, "The preacher stood there as an attorney from Heaven to indict and prosecute the sinner." It was "logic on fire" and had as its aim "God's glory which is always the first priority and the final justification for all that is to be thought, said and done."

Benjamin M Palmer spent much of his ministerial life during the time of war and 'Reconstruction' when there was widespread financial loss, epidemic and plague. It was also a time of increasing secularism and growing liberal tendencies. In one of his sermons Palmer gives a glimpse of his own pastoral burden, which he says was "to pour in a drop of balm." He saw that people were wounded and hurt and in great need of healing and restoration.

Palmer's lifetime ministry in which he exhibited "an utter freedom from self consciousness" was spent in New Orleans. He laboured there with only a short interruption from 1856 - 1902. The author identifies as one of the features of Palmer's ministry "a profound sympathy allied to a realistic pastoral insight."

The final preacher considered is John L Girardeau, known to many for his book against the use of instrumental music in the worship of the church. In Girardeau there is says Kelly a balance between intellect and heart which is not always seen in all forms of Calvinism.

A great deal of Girardeau's ministry was directed to the black people of South Carolina. He had a particular burden for this section of the population and following his licensure declined a call to a large church to enable him to minister to them. Thousands of black people in the state of South Carolina were touched and changed by his ministry. Yet this was a man who also preached before the Legislature of the State. He "knew death to self on behalf of others."

This is a refreshing book. It deals with an important subject and with men who deserve to be better known. It helps us evaluate our own society and culture. It reinforces the conviction that preaching is indispensable in the work of the Kingdom of God. It encourages preachers with the assurance that God uses men of varying personalities, backgrounds, gifts and temperament. It strengthens our desire and prayer for the outpouring of God's Spirit on all who preach the Gospel. The book is very attractively produced and though a little expensive for its size is warmly recommended.

C.K. Hyndman

Samuel Rutherford and His Friends, Faith Cook, Banner of Truth Trust, Pb.1992, 150pp. £3.95.

In the main this is a book on the letters of Samuel Rutherford. Those Letters have been held in high esteem by godly men. Richard Baxter went so far as to say, "Hold off the Bible, such a book the world never saw". C.H. Spurgeon wrote, "When we are dead and gone let the world know that Spurgeon held Rutherford's Letters to be the nearest thing to inspiration which can be found in all the writings of mere men."

There were those who wanted to publish the Letters even during Rutherford's lifetime but he adamantly refused permission. They were first published in 1664, just three years after Rutherford's death, by Robert McWard, who had acted as Rutherford's secretary for a time. Andrew Bonar published an edition in 1836 (revised and published in 1891), in

which he placed the Letters chronologically, prefacing each with a short notice giving the circumstances in which each Letter was written. The Banner of Truth Trust republished Bonar's 1891 edition in 1984.

Marcus L. Loane (*Makers of Religious Freedom*, 1960) wrote of Rutherford's Letters: "But these letters may not evoke the same spontaneous admiration today; one may need to acquire a taste for them as a result of patient study and sympathetic insight. This is because they are steeped in the style for which Bernard of Clairvaux was famous, and there is much in their language which seems lush and unreal to a modern reader." It must be granted that the Letters of Samuel Rutherford are being read today only by a select number who have acquired "a taste for them". That being the case Faith Cook has done an excellent service for in her book she makes part of the devotional riches of those famous Letters available to the ordinary Christian reader at the end of the twentieth century.

'Samuel Rutherford and His Friends' is a short book (150 pp). The first chapter which is on the life of Rutherford himself is longer but the other fourteen chapters (averaging under ten pages) can be used as bedside reading. It is written in a lucid style and is suitable not only for the type of people who read theological journals but also for the more general reader and even for young people. The stories of Rutherford's friends are placed in the context of the stirring times in which they lived. Recurring sympathetic reference to such contemporary happenings as the signing of the Covenants in 1638 and 1643, the proceedings of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, the persecutions of the times, together with familiar quotations being placed in context and occasional mention of Northern Ireland, all combine to ensure that the modern Covenanter in particular will feel very much at home in this book. The reading of it may even have the salutary effect of whetting the appetite of one here and another there and leading them "to acquire a taste for" the Letters of Samuel Rutherford - all 365 of them, "one a day to read for a year!"

Faith Cook has written a companion book entitled 'Grace in Winter' with the subtitle 'Rutherford in Verse' (96 pp). "In these pages, Faith Cook has sensitively transformed Rutherford's eloquent prose into the form of poetry, and provided cameo portraits of his correspondents. 'Grace in Winter' not only gives pleasure and joy because of its poetry; it also shares the encouragement, comfort and wisdom of Rutherford's own ministry."

It also sounds like an interesting book.

A.C. Gregg

BOOK NOTICES

Literary Strategy in the Epistle of Jude, J. Daryl Charles, Associated University Presses, 1993, 258pp. £32.50.

A highly technical work, with nearly 60 pages of notes and over 20 of biography, this is an endeavour to explore the literary form of the most neglected book in the New Testament. Dr. Charles contends that how theological content is expressed cannot be divorced from the message itself. His study is therefore chiefly concerned with the literary impulse behind the epistle.

After a literary-rhetorical analysis, attention is devoted to the Palestinian milieu, use of the Old Testament and of extrabiblical source material. The author understands the work as a carefully crafted unity, dating from the end of the 1st century and addressed to a particular pastoral situation. Jude is seeking to strengthen and exhort the faithful by painting in graphic terms the fate of the unfaithful. His choice of language, imagery and resources is skilfully designed to persuade his audience.

While emphatically a book for the specialist, this work is a useful reminder of the value for exegesis of a greater understanding of the thought world and literary milieu of the New Testament. It also raises the interesting question of the place of conscious craftsmanship in our preaching and writing today.

Edward Donnelly

Men, Women and Order in the Church, Three sermons published by John Calvin, translated by Seth Skolnitsky. Presbyterian Heritage Publications, P.O. Box 180922 Dallas, Texas, 1992. Pb. 63pp. \$4.95.

The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women, John Knox. 1993, Pb. 95pp. \$5.95. Presbyterian Heritage Publications. Available from Free Presbyterian Bookroom, 133 Woodland Road, Glasgow, G3 6LE.

Seth Skolnitsky, a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary, has made available in a good English translation three sermons by Calvin on

1 Corinthians 11:2-13 in which he discusses the relationship of men and women to God and to each other in church and society. Basic to Calvin's understanding of the passage is his recognition of a biblical structure of four ranks: "God, who has His supreme lordship; Jesus Christ, who is thereunder (Calvin understands this in a mediatorial sense) and us under Jesus Christ. Likewise, however, men are distinguished from women, so that men are under Jesus Christ as their head, and women have men for their head" (p.19). These sermons are worth studying. There is much relating to order and good tradition which is still relevant. We may not always accept the Reformer's viewpoint, as, for example, when he understands the Apostle's reference to a woman praying or prophesying as a hypothetical case, as if Paul had written, "Let us suppose that a woman were preaching..."(p.28). This is to overlook the charismatic and temporary nature of such prophecy in apostolic times before the New Testament was given. Any new English translation of Calvin's sermons is to be welcomed. Skolnitsky has done good work here.

If feminists dislike Calvin's sermons, they will be enraged by John Knox's famous 'First Blast.' It was first published anonymously in Geneva in 1558. Knox wished to keep his identity secret until he issued two more blasts, intending to reveal his name with the publication of the *Third Blast!* This was not to be, but he did later publish a summary of what he proposed to discuss in the *Second Blast*. This summary is included in this reprint. The publishers are to be thanked for making this material available.

A Watered Garden, A brief History of the Protestant Churches in America, Gertrude Hoeksema. Reformed Free Publishing Association, P.O. Box 2006, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A. 1992. Hb. 405pp. \$19.95.

Many years ago a young Calvin College student sat spellbound as he listened to a youthful preacher in a Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. The preacher was Herman Hoeksema, the student Cornelius Van Til. Van Til admired and respected Hoeksema, but they differed over common grace, as Van Til's book on the subject shows. In 1924, under Hoeksema's leadership, a split occurred in the Christian Reformed Church and the Protestant Reformed Churches came into being. This history brings up to date an earlier work by Herman Hoeksema and compliments Gertrude Hoeksema's other work, *Therefore Have I Spoken*. It tells of the controversy in the CRC in the twenties concerning the doctrine of 'common

grace': that was a sad and embittered ecclesiastical storm. Relating the subsequent work and witness of these churches the book inevitably concentrates on doctrinal and principal differences between the PRCA and the CRC.

In the Preface "M.H" refers to "the *development*" of the faith in their churches "both in their doctrines and teachings, especially concerning sovereign grace and the covenant..." An appendix presents an address by Professor H.C. Hoeksema (Herman Hoeksema's son) delivered at Calvin Seminary in 1974 in which he stated that while they had not changed fundamentally since 1924 their theology had been "refined and enriched." Such development is probably inevitable for young churches, but there must always be a care lest in going beyond confessional bounds it may unwittingly lead to distortion and imbalance, not that this need be the case. This book is attractively produced and illustrated and provides an informative and useful record of this aspect of Reformed theology in America.

Seeking Our Brothers in the Light, A Plea for Reformed Ecumenity. Ed. Theodore Platinga. Inheritance Publications, Box 154, Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada. 1992. Pb. 142pp. Can.\$4.95 U.S. \$4.50.

This symposium relates largely to divisions within Reformed churches of the Dutch tradition. However it touches on principles that are of much wider interest. It is particularly interesting in its discussion of the issues at stake in the disciplinary measures taken against Klass Schilder under whose leadership the "Liberated" churches in the Netherlands were formed.

A Mighty Fortress in the Storm, Paulina M. Rustenburg Bootsma. Inheritance Publications, 1992. Pb. 174pp. Can.\$11.95 U.S. \$10.90.

A true and moving account of real events in the Netherlands during the Nazi occupation. This is the story of the trials and faith of a Reformed family that joined the Resistance. A gripping story well told.

Against the World, The Odyssey of Athanasius. Henry W. Coray. Inheritance Publications 1992. Pb.111pp. Can.\$8.95 U.S. \$7.90.

This is a "fictionalised profile" of the life of Athanasius who died in 373

A.D. It is based on material culled from the writings of reliable church historians. Coray is a graduate of Wheaton College and Westminster Theological Seminary.

William of Orange the Silent Prince, W.G. Van de Hulst. Inheritance Publications. 1992. Pb. 142pp. Can.\$8.95 U.S. \$7.90.

A biography, written for children, that tells about the life of one of the greatest of the Protestant heroes in Europe.

F.S.Leahy