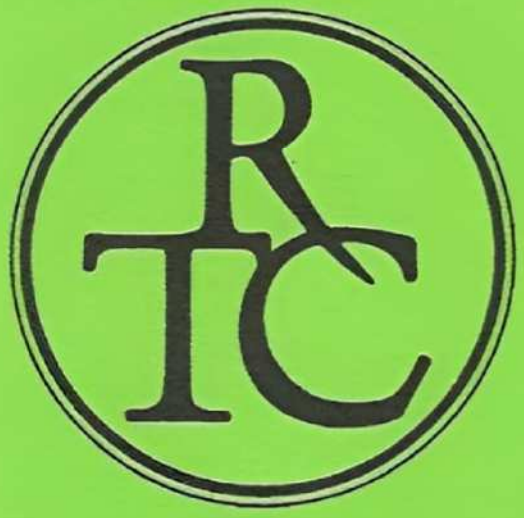


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by

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# R.T.J. 1985-1994

Some anniversaries are more notable than others, and more widely recognized as significant. With this issue we mark the tenth anniversary of the publication of the Reformed Theological Journal. In a world where some national newspapers and not a few periodicals have been in existence for over a century this particular anniversary may not appear worthy of note. Yet the editors and, we trust, the contributors and subscribers can see that it is deserving of at least some acknowledgement.

In publishing the Journal we retain the conviction that the mind must be instructed in the truth that then the heart may be captivated by the truth. The Scripture calls us to 'prepare our minds for action'. This is surely a particular necessity in a day when among many the use of the mind is seen as much less vital than the arousing of the emotions. It is true that 'the Holy Spirit generally reaches the heart through the mind'. So we remain thankful for the privilege of serving Christ's Church through the pages of this Journal and of stimulating a deeper study of His Word and works.

A Journal is not however the chief means of teaching God's people. It remains true, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism states, that "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".

Accordingly the Journal unashamedly has sought to be of help to those who preach that Word. In this issue again there are articles dealing with preaching, including the training of preachers, their work and the authority of preaching which is rooted of course in the authority of Scripture itself. We are also reminded that the confidence of God's people rests absolutely on the faithfulness of Him Who has called them through His Word. Anniversaries speak to us of the passing of time but Scripture speaks to us of that faithfulness which endures for ever.

C.K.H.

# PATRICK : THE MAN AND HIS MISSION

**by Andrew C Gregg**

*Andrew C Gregg is Minister of Milford Reformed Presbyterian Church, Co Donegal. He lectures in the Irish Bible School, Tipperary.*

'Saint Patrick.' 'The Apostle of Ireland.' 'Our Patron Saint.' 'Celebrations on the Seventeenth of March.' We know so much about him! But what do we know for sure about the man who introduced himself with the words, "Ego Patricius peccator rusticissimus et minimus omnium fidelium et contemptibilissimus apud plurimos" ("I am Patrick, a sinner, unlettered, the least of all the faithful, and held in contempt by a great many people")? We know that he had nothing to do with the fact that Ireland is free of snakes and venomous reptiles. We know that it is almost certain that he did not teach the Irish people the doctrine of the Trinity using the simple shamrock as an illustration. But did he work as a slave tending sheep on Slemish, Co. Antrim? Did he light an Easter fire at Tara Hill in opposition to the expressed wish of the High King? Did his old master burn himself to death rather than face the challenge of being converted to Christianity? Was he the founder of Armagh as the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland? Did he die on the Seventeenth of March and was he buried at Downpatrick in Co. Down? Most of these and other questions cannot be answered at all. Many other questions cannot be answered with any degree of certainty. Nevertheless there are things that we do know and it is with these that this article is concerned.

## SOURCES

The issue of sources of information is vital. The writings where we learn about Patrick and the times in which he lived fall into two categories : those written by other people about Patrick and those written by himself.

### *1. People's writings about Patrick*

Many books have been written on Patrick and many more on early Christian Ireland make reference to him. There are quite a number of books, especially some published in very recent times, that are very helpful.

Unfortunately there are just as many, if not more, that have very little value. Some are worse than useless. Not only do they not inform us about the real Patrick but they present a grotesque caricature of the man. Chief among the latter are the earliest writings on Patrick, by people other than Patrick himself. These are the *Vita Patricii* (Life of Patrick) by Muirchu and the *Breviarium* (Brief Account) by Tirechan, both written near the end of the 7th century. These were among the earliest writings described by scholars as 'hagiography', that is, the branch of literature which treats of the lives of saints. Ludwig Bieler is being overly generous when he says of such writings: "The Middle Ages had inherited from Antiquity the idea that the biographer of a great man - and for the Christian world the saint was the great man *par excellence* - should set up a model to be admired and imitated. The Life of a Saint, primarily intended to answer a demand for edification and spiritual progress, would dwell upon his virtues and miracles; his temporal activites might be mentioned but incidentally; strict accuracy or completeness were not essential."[1] Later, with specific reference to Muirchu and Tirechan, Bieler writes : "Of course those people were less 'factual' than we are; nobody would think it great harm to improve upon a story, even upon a true story, or think the story less true for being improved upon."[2] Other writers are less generous than Bieler. J. M. Holmes says of the medieval 'Lives' of Patrick : "in spite of a few grains of truth all are hopelessly corrupted with folklore, legend, and a mass of unbelievable miracles."[3] Muirchu's contribution is dismissed by E. A. Thompson as a "mountain of miracle and other claptrap".[4] In short, the writings of medieval authors are completely unreliable.

Sadly, over the centuries, far too many writers imitated the early medieval authors, regurgitation their material and confirming their mistakes. There were of course exceptions. In 1639, James Ussher, Protestant Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland, published as Chapter XVII of his Antiquities of the British Churches "the first truly critical account of St. Patrick's life, his mission and the beginnings of Irish Christianity".[5] A book by J.B. Bury, published in 1905, "opened a new era in Patrician scholarship".[6] He differed from some earlier authors in that he "did not set out to prove a particular point".[7] The last half century, beginning with a published lecture by T.F O'Rahilly in 1942, has seen a succession of excellent books and some of the best have been published in the very recent past.

Important as all these sources of information are they are not to be compared with a source that is more ancient than any of them. The best writings derive their merit from the fact that they draw largely from this earlier fountain. To that source we now turn.

*2. Patrick's own writings*

One writer says : "We know Patrick because of an almost unbelievable stroke of good luck".[8] The way another author puts it is to be preferred : "In the providence of God, somehow, somewhere in Ireland, two works of Patrick himself were reverently preserved and copied".[9] The first of these two works was his 'Confession', so called because the last of its sixty-two paragraphs ends with the sentence, "And this is my Confession before I die". "The Confession is a reply to certain detractors who had been suggesting that Patricius was neither learned nor competent enough to hold the office of Bishop of Hibernia".[10] The second composition of Patrick that has survived the centuries was his "Letter to Coroticus". Coroticus was a British chieftain whose soldiers had carried out a raid in Ireland, slaughtered some of Patrick's converts and sold others into slavery under heathen masters. When an earlier letter to Coroticus (which hasn't survived) was ignored Patrick wrote a second letter sternly denouncing the attack, demanding the release of the captives and excommunicating Coroticus who was nominally Christian.

These two writings are the earliest documents in Ireland's literary heritage".[11] Clearly they are enormously valuable. Agreement regarding their authenticity is practically universal. It is interesting that the only scholars to have doubts about Patrick and his writings have belonged to the Greman school of 'higher criticism'. "The historian J. von Pflugk-Harttung questioned St. Patrick's authorship of the *Confession* and *Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus*. Heinrich Zimmer, the well known Celtic scholar, denied not only St. Patrick's apostolate, but his very existence".[12] We can accept that Patrick did exist and that the two documents attributed to him are genuine.

There are some other writings that purport to provide information on Patrick but even if it could be proved that they are authentic they would add very little to our knowledge of the man and his mission. Among these are the *Dicta Patricii* (Sayings of Patrick). They are only three or four in number as well as being brief and rather obscure. One or two of them are

very short quotations from Patrick's accepted writings. Then there is the *Hymn of St. Secundinus* who, it is claimed, was a contemporary of Patrick. "This hymn is an enthusiastic praise of Patrick's work and virtues; the saint is spoken of as still alive, and portrayed by someone who knew him well".[13] Written by a contemporary or not this abecedarian or alphabetical poem of twenty - three stanzas adds little to our knowledge of Patrick. Much better known is the *Lorica* (Breastplate of St. Patrick) made popular by Mrs C. F. Alexander's version, "I bind unto myself today...." "It is a fine piece of work, but it is almost certainly not by St. Patrick because the experts in ancient Irish tell us that its language belongs to a stage of the development of that tongue several centuries after Patrick's day".[14] For reliable information we must look to Patrick's own undisputed writings as well as to authors who are competent to tell us about the conditions that pertained in fifth- century Ireland and in Europe generally.

## THE MAN

The aim of Patrick in his writings was not to tell the story of his life. "He was not writing for the benefit of posterity. He wrote each of his books - they should really be called 'letters' - in a given situation, one in a time of controversy, the other after a brutal crime. He had no thought of futher generations as he penned them."[15] Yet these documents do inform us about Patrick, the man.

### *1. His early life*

Patrick was born and grew up on the western side of Roman Britain in or near a village called Bannavem Taberniae (or something similar), the location of which is not known. His grandfather was Potitus, a presbyter, and his father was Calpornius, a deacon. (Muirch, the 7th century hagiographer, said that Patricks's mother was called Conchessa but with what authority we do not know.) It seems evident that the spirituality of Patrick's family was not as pronounced as their ecclesiastical offices would suggest. As well as being a deacon Patrick's father was a 'decurion', an official of the local town council under the Roman administration. One of the responsibilities of a decurion was to raise taxes for the imperial government in his own area. If he was unable to collect the levied amount he had to make up the balance from his own resources. It wasn't always easy to afford the honour of being a town councillor. A way of avoiding this

burden was to become ordained as a Church officer because those who held such positions were freed from the responsibility of collecting taxes. It is most likely that Patrick's father and possibly also his grandfather had availed of this tax loophole. This is not to say that the young Patrick was brought up irreligiously. He speaks of "our bishops who used to warn us about our salvation" (Confession 1).[16] He acknowledges that he and others did not respond to the teaching that they received : "we had deserted God and we had not observed his commandments" (Confession 1). He refers to one particular sin, without revealing its nature, that he committed when he was about fifteen years of age. At that time he "was not a believer in the living God" and "lay in death and disbelief" (Confession 27). He was to be given a painful reminder of this sin at a later stage of his life. The spiritual poverty of his youth existed side by side with material prosperity. His father owned a villa or an estate and Patrick could speak of the "aristocratic status" that he had enjoyed and was willing to surrender. His privileged background would have meant that he had access to a good education. However, a traumatic event was to occur that would cut short his education and deprive him of his privileges.

*2. His enslavement*

About the time of Patrick's early life, that is, over the first years of the 5th century, Roman influence in Britain, as elsewhere, was on the wane. With the Roman troops gone the country was left wide open to raiding bands from Ireland who made regular forays across the Irish Sea. It was during one of these incursions that Patrick, then a youth of almost sixteen years of age, was taken captive and brought to Ireland as a slave.

Later tradition has held that Patrick's captivity was spent at Slemish, Co. Antrim, and this view went largely unchallenged until relatively recent times. In his writings Patrick mentions only one Irish place name, that of "the Wood of Voclut which is near the Western Sea" (Confession 23). When he took flight and deserted the man with whom he had been for six years he had to travel about "two hundred miles" to the ship that took him away from Ireland (Confession 17). One of the 7th century hagiographers, Tirechan, identified the Wood of Voclut with "the wood of Fochloth" in Connaught, "a name commonly believed to survive in modern Faughill, near Killala, Co. Mayo".[17] It may or may not be helpful that Tirechan was himself a native of that area. All things considered it seems reasonable to conclude that the location of Patrick's captivity was in Co. Mayo. One

suggested solution to the problem runs : "Patrick may have been in both areas, either because he was sold by a master in one area to a new owner in the other or because, after his six years of captivity in Co. Antrim, he escaped to Britain or the continent through a port in Co, Mayo."[18]

Whatever the scene of his captivity, those six years changed him utterly. The effects in terms of physical privation and mental trauma to a young man brought up in a privileged home can only be imagined. Our particular interest is on the spiritual impact and forunately it is on this that Patrick dwells. He viewed the enslavement of himself and others as the chastisement of God : "it was according to what we deserved.....so God brought upon us the anger of his indignation and scattered us among many nations" (Confession 1). He responds positively to this chastisement : "this was rather for my good, because I was reformed by God through the experience" (Confession 28). In the land of his captivity he was brought to faith : "it was there that the Lord opened the understanding of my unbelieving heart, so that I should recall my sins even though it was late and I should turn with all my heart to the Lord my God" (confession 2). His conversion led to a life of growing devotion : "I tended herds every day and I used to pray many times during the day. More and more my love of God and reverence for him began to increase. My faith grew stronger and my zeal so intense that in the course of a single day I would say as many as a hundred prayers, and almost as many in the night"(Confession 16).

*3. His escape*

Patrick tells of his escape from slavery in considerable detail. One night he heard a voice saying to him in a dream that he would soon return to his country. A short time later it was conveyed to him by God that his ship was ready. This port lay about two hundred miles away in a place where he had never been before. He took flight deserting the man with whom he had been for six years and "came in the power of God who was guiding" him and reached the ship (Confession 17). At first he was refused permission to sail because "out of fear of God" he would not engage in their pagan way of sealing a bond of friendship, namely that of sucking the nipples of the crew. However they quickly changed their mind and allowed him to travel with them (Confession 18). After three days they reached land and then travelled for twenty-eight days through "deserted country". Their provisions ran out and the captain said to Patrick, "How now, Christian? You say your God is great and all-powerful; why then can't you pray for us? For we are in

danger of starving; it will go hard with us ever to see a human being again." Patrick replied, "Turn sincerely with all your heart to the Lord my God, because nothing is impossible to him, so that today he may send you food in your way until you are satisfied, because he has abundance." Presently a herd of pigs was encountered. They killed many of them and stayed there a couple of days while they "were well refreshed and their strength was renewed". As a result the men "gave the fullest thanks to God and (Patrick) was esteemed in their eyes". They also found wild honey but when offering some of it to Patrick one of the men said, "It is a sacrificial offering", and Patrick refused to eat it (Confession 19). That same night he experienced a strong attack by Satan : "He fell upon me like a huge rock, and I could not move a limb." Patrick himself thought it strange that he found himself crying out "Elijah! Elijah!" "The next thing that happened was that the radiance of that sun fell upon me and at once dispersed from me all paralysis, and I believe that I was succoured by Christ my Lord and his Spirit was at that moment crying out on my behalf" (Confession 20). At the end of the twenty-eight day period they "reached human habitations", by which time they had no food left (Confession 22). After that he was able to return home and be reunited with his family (Confession 23).

Patrick's account of his escape from Ireland raises a number of questions and there are no ready answers. For example, would it have taken three days to sail to Britain and how was it possible to travel for twenty-eight days through "uninhabited country"? A suggested answer given by J. B. Bury is "that Patrick and his companions were travelling not on British soil but in Gaul, since a terrible invasion of Gaul by barbarian tribes from east of the Rhine took place in 407, and it is known that they left a trail of devastation and desolation behind them as they moved westwards over Gaul".[19] This would mean that Patrick returned to his home land in Britain not directly but via the continent. However, Bury (and the others who share that view,) may be wrong and there could be other explanations for the three days on sea and the twenty-eight days on land. Another question that has often been discussed relates to the incident where Patrick calls on Elijah. R. P. C. Hanson makes this comment :

> It is hardly possible to appreciate the point of this account of a confused experience narrated by Patrick unless we realize that Latin for Elijah is *Helias* (vocative *Helia*) and that the Greek for the sun is *helios*.... In his subconscious mind by this resemblance of words the prophet Elijah and the rising sun became associated or identified.[20]

## THE MISSION

When Patrick got back to Britain he was with his family, who, he tells us, "received me as a son, and sincerely begged of me that at least now, after all the many troubles I had endured, I should not leave them to go anywhere" (Confession 23). But it was not to be. He would return to Ireland, this time as a missionary, and never again "revisit any of (his) kinspeople" (Letter 10).[21]

### *1. His call*

Patrick was very conscious of "the great acts of goodness and the great grace which the Lord generously gave (him) in the land of (his) captivity" (Confession 3). Consequently he felt that he was "a debtor to God" who was "strictly bound to cry out so as to make some repayment to the Lord for those benefits of his" (Confession 12). It was a natural outcome of his conversion that he "should take trouble and labour for the salvation of others" (Confession 28). Then there was the Macedonian-type call to be a missionary in Ireland which he relates in this way :

> I saw in a vision of the night a man coming apparently from Ireland whose name was Victoricus, with an uncountable number of letters, and he gave me one of them and I read the heading of the letter which ran, 'the cry of the Irish', and while I was reading aloud the heading of the letter I was imagining that at that very moment I heard the voice of those who were by the Wood of Voclut which is near the Western Sea, and this is what they cried, as with one voice, 'Holy boy, we are asking you to come and walk among us again', and I was struck deeply to the heart and I was not able to read any further and at that I woke up. God be thanked that after several years the Lord granted to them according to their cry" (Confession 23).

### *2. His preparation*

It would appear that several years passed between the time of Patrick's call and his return to Ireland. We do not know how long that period was nor how he prepared for his mission. It is likely that he spent some time studying on the contintent. The first of the so-called *Dicta Patricii* (Sayings of Patrick) in the Book of Armagh is signifcant in this connection. It reads, "I had the fear of God to guide me on my journey through Gaul and Italy and in the islands of the Tyrrhenian Sea".[22] In his writings Patrick does refer

to Gaul on a couple of occasions. He tells how Christians in Gaul would "ransom baptized people who have been captured" (Letter 14 ). During his mission he spoke of a willingness to visit Britain and journey "even as far as Gaul to visit the brothers" (Confession 43). Both Muirchu and Tirechan maintain that Patrick "spent a considerable time on the continent and received there a belated education."[23] How good Patrick's education was is an interesting subject. He himself refers repeatedly to his lack of education and traditionally scholars have believed that this was indeed the case. However, two recently published books take a different view. In one it is concluded that "Patrick's description of himself as 'most unlettered' reflects his humility rather than the objective truth".[24] The other attacks the concensus "that Patrick was a barely literate rustic struggling with a sense of his inadequacy in a language he could not master" and suggests instead that he was "an artist of astonishing literary skill".[25] If these conclusions are confirmed it will mean that future studies on Patrick's writings will take a very different line than they have taken in the past.

### *3. His coming*

With the standing at least of that of a deacon, Patrick came to Ireland as a missionary sometime between 430 and 460. He gives no dates in his writings nor any other information that would help in settling on a definite year for the commencement of his Irish mission. There was no agreement among later sources and writers on the issue. It is known that Palladius was sent to Ireland in 431 and the view became generally accepted that the mission of Palladius was short-lived and that Patrick followed him in 432. In a lecture given in 1942, T. F. O'Rahilly[26] argued in favour of a date about twenty-five years later than the traditional one and for some years thereafter writers, including James Carney,[27] were in general agreement with O'Rahilly. However "in the last two decades the traditionalists have staged a comeback. The conservative dating of about 432-461 for Patrick's mission, and a birthdate c385, is now, once more generally accepted".[28] What can be dismissed out of hand is Tirechan's view that Patrick had a mosaic lifespan of 120 years! The early medieval belief that Patrick died on 17th March at Saul and was buried at Downpatrick cannot be confirmed,

### *4. His teaching*

The outstanding feature of Patrick's writings and no doubt also of his ministry was his use of Scripture. It has been said that he was "a *homo unius*

*libri* 'a man of one book'" and that "he read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested that book".[29] His writings are crammed with biblical quotations, one writer says that "he uses over 200 of these".[30] His teaching "would have been simple" and his creed "a straight-forward statement of the basic tenets of Christianity". [31] He accepted and taught the doctrine of the Trinity. The idea of using the illustration of the shamrock was "first mentioned in Caleb Threlkeld's Preface to his *Synopsis Stirpium Hibernarum*, published in 1727. Threlkeld probably took it from an earlier souce, a manuscript of 1640, now lost; but before this date the legend is not recorded."[32] Prominent in Patrick's writings is the belief that he was living in the last days and that the second Advent and the Day of Judgement were coming soon. "He links this with his evangelistic activity in Ireland. Ireland, to a man of classical antiquity, was literally the last country on earth. It was the most westerly country in Europe; beyond it was nothing but the vast unexplored ocean stretching on to the edge of the world. Patrick was called by God to preach the gospel to the last nation in the last days. This expectation of the end of the world had been given a great impetus by the capture of Rome by Alaric in 410 and the gradual extinction of the Western Roman Empire thereafter. Such an expectation would be understandable in a man who had witnessed these unprecedented and appalling events in his youth, having been brought up in the assumption that the Roman Empire, now that it was Christian, could never collapse, since God would grant it immunity from disaster."[33] All of this helps to explain the commitment and boldness with which he approached his task.

### *5. His success*

Patrick, of course, was not without his faults. Given the times and the circumstances in which he lived it would have been strange if he didn't have certain limitations. There were influential Church people at the time who disapproved of some aspects of his missionary work and his 'Confession' was written mainly to answer their accusations. Perhaps some of their criticisms were justified. In his biblical quotations he uses some from the apocryphal books. He went too far in his policy of 'contextualization' and 'inculturation'[34] and the results have remained in Irish religious life. He actively encouraged the setting up of celibate religious communities. The various dreams/voices/visions indicate a strong mystical element in his Christianity. Nevertheless the man and his mission were very important. He came to Ireland with certain advantages. His time as a slave taught him the language and made him aware of the socio-political structures in Ireland

and he used these advantages to the full. He challenged the power of the pagan druids and overcame them. He tells us that "God who is most faithful often freed me from slavery and from twelve perils in which my life was endangered, as well as many plots" (Confession35). He enjoyed considerable success in his mission. He could say "that many people were reborn into God" through him (Confession 38); that he baptized "many thousands of people" (Confession 14,50); and that "clergy were ordained everywhere" (Confession 38). He acknowledges that it was all due to the sovereign and gracious work of God. At the very end of his 'Confession' he writes : "If I have achieved or shown any small success according to God's pleasure....you are to think and it must be sincerely believed, that it was the gift of God" (Confession 62).[35] There were Christians in Ireland before Patrick. Palladius had been sent in 431 "to the Irish who believed in Christ". However it was through Patrick's ministry that the Church was established and organized. The significance of his work was not recognized at the time nor for some two hundred years later but insofar as Ireland ever did become "a land of saints" it was largely due, under God, to "Patrick an uneducated sinner". Effectually he did bring Christianity to Ireland. Irish Christians of all traditions can look back with gratitude to God to the man who carried out a mission in their country in the fifth century A.D.

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# JAMES GRACEY MURPHY

## The Man and his Work

**by Frederick S.Leahy**

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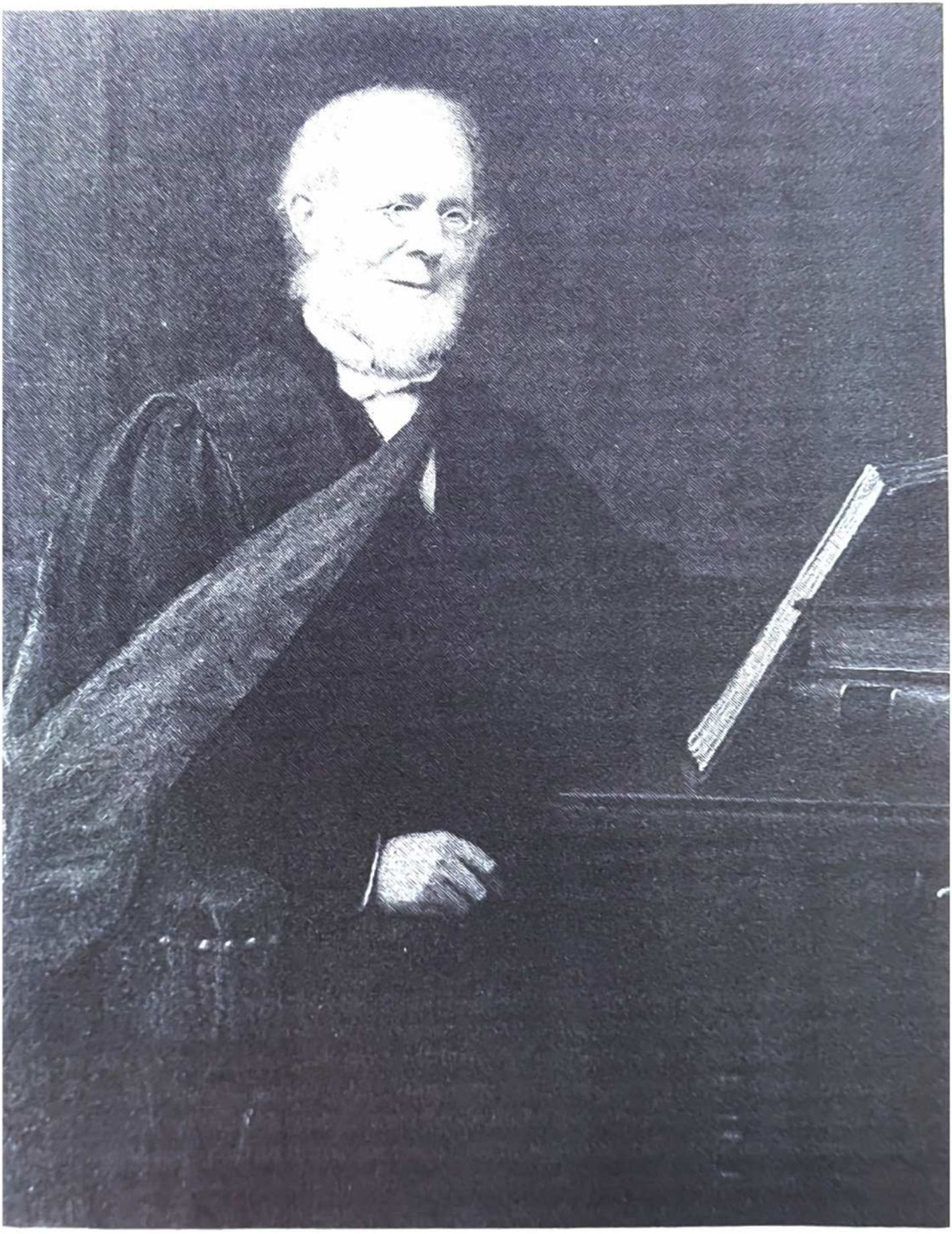
## BIOGRAPHY

James Gracey Murphy was born on 12th., January 1808 in the townland of Ballyaltikilligan, Comber, Co. Down.[1] The son of Hugh Murphy, a farmer, he was educated locally in "a day school of superior character,"[2] and then from 1825 at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution, where he had the advantage of the instruction and friendship of Dr. Hincks, a distinguished scholar. In 1827 he obtained a scholarship to enter Trinity College, Dublin, at the age of nineteen. He was registered as a 'sizar,' which meant that he received his university education free in return for duties performed for the College.[3] He obtained the status of 'scholar' in 1830, which carried certain privileges, and graduated Bachelor of Arts in 1833.

In 1842 Trinity College awarded Murphy the degrees of LL.B and LL.D and there is no record of these having been honorary degrees.[4] From 1876 non-Anglicans were eligible for the divinity degrees of Trinity College and Murphy was the first Presbyterian to receive one of these. He graduated Bachelor of Divinity in 1880, obtaining his doctorate in divinity *honoris causa* in the same year.[5] It can only be assumed that Murphy submitted to the examination for the B.D. degree because of the difficulty of obtaining the higher degree *per saltum* (in one leap).[6]

On 26th., October 1836, having been a divinity student under the care of the Dublin Presbytery and having been licensed, Murphy was ordained by the Presbytery of Raphoe, Co. Donegal, and installed in the congregation of Ballyshannon in that same county. Two years previously the congregation had been separated from the congregation in Donegal town, a new meeting house erected and Murphy was the first minister.[7] In 1837 he married a daughter of Andrew Kirkpatrick who resided near Saintfield in Co. Down.[8]



*James Gracey Murphy*

*The Ballyshannon Herald* (28/10/1836) gave a fulsome account of the service of ordination and following reception. Rev. Mr. Steele preached "an eloquent and impressive sermon on the duties of minister and people from Acts 20:17." Rev. Mr. Killen's (Raphoe) defence of Presbyterian church government was "delivered in a chastened and classic style throughout." Rev. Mr. Dill (Carnone) conducted the ordination service "in a most impressive manner" and Rev. Mr. Kirkpatrick of Dublin "delivered a most pathetic and important address to minister and people."[9]

Murphy's time in the pastorate was short. He resigned on 10th., August 1841 and removed to Belfast having been appointed Headmaster of the Classical Department of The Royal Belfast Academical Institution.[10] There were close ties between the Irish Presbyterian Church and R.B.A.I., and in November 1843 representatives of the Assembly and the Joint Boards of R.B.A.I. met in conference.[11] For the Assembly the opinion was expressed that the subjects of Hebrew, Ethics and Biblical Greek should be regarded as theological subjects and that appointments to these Chairs should be made by the Assembly. The Joint Boards were unable to agree to this transfer of power and thus an impasse was reached.

The Church then communicated directly with one of the Professors at the Institution, Professor Bruce, and stated that since New Testament Greek was not taught in his class, the Assembly had decided to appoint a professor for this subject. The class thus formed was entrusted to Professor William Hart, who then taught Hebrew in the Institution. "This irregular procedure was the more irregular owing to the fact that the new class was conducted within the Institution without the permission of the Joint Boards, who for a time indeed were not aware of its existence. Upon learning from Bruce what had happened they were deeply incensed, and the class was 'forthwith excluded.'"[12]

In a letter to Bruce (dated 5th., November 1844) it was intimated by the Assembly that Hart's appointment was to continue "until a permanent arrangement can be effected in the contemplated Presbyterian College." This was the first official word that the Institution had that such a college was envisaged. In due course the class in Greek was placed under the care of Rev. J.G. Murphy, head of the Classical School. (At that time there was no one figure in charge of the whole school; it was half a century after Murphy's time there that a Principal was appointed). The Joint Boards were displeased at Murphy accepting this additional responsibility, but he

politely pointed out that the class would meet after school hours, when his time was presumably his own.[13] The Greek class which he conducted met in Linenhall Street church session room.[14]

As early as 1843 there were proposals in favour of establishing a theological Faculty which would be under the control of the Church. This took effect in 1847 when such a Faculty was constituted with Henry Cooke as its first President. It consisted of the following members: Rev. Samuel Hanna and Rev. John Edgar, joint Professors of Divinity; Rev. Robert Wilson, Professor of Biblical Criticism; Rev. William D.Killen, Professor of Ecclesiastical History, Church Government and Pastoral Theology; Mr. Edward Masson, Professor of New Testament and Ecclesiastical Greek; Rev. James G.Murphy, Professor of Hebrew; Rev. Henry Cooke, Professor of Sacred Rhetoric and Catechetics and Rev. William Gibson, Professor of Moral Philosophy.[15]

Dr. Murphy had applied for the Greek Chair. He was defeated by a small majority in favour of Edward Masson a distinguished scholar, born in Kincardineshire, educated in Edinburgh and Aberdeen and who when in Greece, where he lived for twenty years, became a member of the Areopagus.[16] Masson's appointment did not prove successful and eventually the College Committee initiated procedures to remove him from his Chair, arranging for his class to be taken for the time being by Professors Murphy and Wilson. In 1854 the Chair was abolished.[17]

When lectures began in the newly built college on Monday 2nd., January 1854, the six professors were Edgar, Wilson, Killen, Cooke, Murphy and Gibson.[18] A class for sacred music was introduced to the College after being recommended by the Assembly in 1862. Two members of staff, Murphy and Gibson, were appointed to supervise this class.[19]

Jonathan Bardon, in his *Belfast - An Illustrated History*, points out that Dr. Henry Cooke had been critical of R.B.A.I. for allegedly promoting 'New Light' or Arian views, a charge that was strenuously denied. In 1825 Cooke actually published a 10,000-word letter to refute a declaration by the professors of R.B.A.I. that they did not teach Arian doctrines. This controversy undoubtedly contributed to the decision to open a separate college for theological training. The building itself was designed by Sir Charles Lanyon who designed so many of Belfast's finest buildings.[20]

In 1888 Thomas Walker was appointed assistant and then successor to Dr. Murphy in the Chair of Hebrew. He was an exponent of the new 'higher critical' approach to the Scriptures, and he promulgated the very views that Murphy had so strenuously opposed.[21]

Dr. Murphy died on 19th., April, 1896, aged 88, and his remains were laid to rest in Balmoral Cemetery, Belfast. His wife, Maria, predeceased him in 1887, aged 80. They had five sons; these included a medical doctor who practised in London, one who joined the Indian Civil Service and two ministers of religion. Andrew Charles Murphy studied theology in the Free Church College, Edinburgh, and one of his pastorates was in Riverside congregation in Newry (now dissolved): the present-day Reformed Presbyterian congregation worships in the Riverside building. He was minister of Elmwood church, Belfast, from 1877 to 1891. John Howard Murphy ministered in Trinity church, Cork, from 1890 to 1923.

## BELIEFS

Like his distinguished colleague, Dr. Robert Watts, Murphy resisted the incursions of the 'Higher Criticism' so rife in Germany at that time. This was particularly apparent in his rebuttal of the arguments of Bishop Colenso of Natal regarding the Pentateuch. With a nice balance of logic and wit Murphy demolished Colenso's arguments and defended the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. He rejected Wellhausen's documentary theory leading, in his opinion, to the view that

> the Pentateuch is neither given by inspiration of God nor historically valid, but rather a mechanical compilation of a later age from heterogeneous materials, the discrepancies of which the compiler had not either the sense to perceive or the tact to eliminate.[22]

Murphy, however, saw no conflict between Scripture and Science, although their interpreters might well differ. Both Scripture and Nature were liable to misinterpretation. He was quick to recognise that Scripture was not written as a scientific text-book and that when it speaks of 'sunset', for example, it uses everyday, not scientific, language.

Conservative scholars today would not necessarily accept all Murphy's views regarding creation, the flood and kindred subjects. His position,

however, was thoroughly conservative. Yet he was a cautious conservative, limiting, for example, the Flood to "the region inhabited by man" and warning against giving to terms like 'land' or 'animal' "an extent of meaning beyond what was known or contemplated in primeval times." That viewpoint may be debated, but it illustrates Murphy's caution in interpreting Scripture.[23]

In his treatment of Adam's standing before the Fall, Murphy sees him subject to God's command and law. He does not introduce the probationary theory so common with Reformed writers, the view that if Adam had remained obedient he would eventually have obtained the eternal life that believers now possess in Christ.[24] Such speculation was foreign to his way of thinking as he confined himself to the text of Scripture. He had this to say about the converse that existed between Adam and the Creator.

> We can hardly overestimate the benefit, in the rapid development of his mind, which Adam thus derived from the presence and converse of his Maker. If no voice had struck his ear, no articulate sentence had reached his intellect, no authoritative command had penetrated his conscience, no perception of the Eternal Spirit had been presented to his apprehension, he might have been long in the mute, rude, and imperfectly developed state which has sometimes been ascribed to primeval man. But if contact with a highly accomplished master and a highly polished state of society makes all the difference between the savage and the civilized, what instantaneous expansion and elevation of the primitive mind, while yet in its virgin purity and unimpaired power, must have resulted from free converse with the all-perfect mind of the Creator himself! To the clear eye of native genius a startling idea is a whole science. By the insinuation of a few fundamental and germinant notions in his mind, Adam shot up at once into the full height and compass of a master spirit prepared to scan creation and adore the Creator.[25]

Thus he presents a view of the first man infinitely higher and vastly more ennobling than the depiction of an uncouth, ape-like creature so frequently (and depressingly) presented by the advocates of total evolution. Says Murphy, "Man is a new species. He is to be allied to heaven as no other creature on earth is. He is related to the Eternal Being himself." Thus he understands the words, "In our image, after our likeness."[26]

It is clear, then, that Dr. Murphy was committed to the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture, as originally written, the Word of God "with all the

peculiarities of man and all the authority of God." With 2 Timothy 3:16 in mind he says -

> It is a *writing*, not a writer, of which the character is here given. The thing said to be inspired is not that which goes into the mind of the author, but that which comes out of his mind by means of his pen. It is not the material on which he is to exercise his mind, but the result of that mental exercise which is here characterized. Hence it has received all the impress, not merely of man in general, but even of the individual author in particular, at the time it is so designated. It is that piece of composition which the human author has put into a written form which is described as inspired. This is the true warrant for, and proper meaning of, the phrase *verbal inspiration*. To be inspired of God, is to be communicated from God, who is a spirit, to the mind of man. The *modus operandi*, mode of communication, we do not pretend to explain. But the possibility of such communication we cannot for a moment doubt.[27]

No dictation theory there! and no dynamic theory which would see inspiration as a quality of the writers, much less the strange theory that would divorce thoughts from words, but, rather, an *organic* view of inspiration, seeing the writers as the organs of the Holy Spirit, doing their own research, using their own vocabulary, living in their writings, yet writing precisely what God intended. Thus "men moved (carried along) by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet. 1.21).

Murphy's doctrine of the Atonement was equally robust. Propitiation was of the essence of Christ's redemptive work, as was substitution. He saw *Leviticus* as "the central book of the Pentateuch."[28] He stressed the activity of the Triune God in redemption.

> The Father pardons, the Son propitiates, the Spirit purifies. The first of these three propositions invites the other two. Because it is the Father's purpose to remit sin, He sends His Son to redeem and His Spirit to regenerate. The first has two seemingly insurmountable obstacles to encounter. How can God, being just, forgive sin; and, how can man, being evil, return to God? The former is overcome by the atonement, in which the Son of God becoming man obeys the law and dies the death, that the sinner who trusts in Him with penitent heart may escape death and enter into life. The latter is overcome by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, Who by the gospel makes the sinner aware of the mercy of the Father and the mediation of the Son, and willing to lean on the Saviour and return to the Fountain of mercy.[29]

Dr Murphy had a clearly defined doctrine of justification.

> Justification has two sides, a negative and a positive; it includes the pardon of sin in us, and the acceptance of righteousness for us.[30]

Sanctification he saw as

> a process begun in the new birth and continued in the new life. As long as there is a remnant of sin or of the old man we must present the petition, "Forgive us our debts," and plead for acceptance the merits of the Substitute.[31]

Murphy sums up the symbolism and teaching of the Book of Leviticus, which he terms "the figurative exhibition of the way of salvation," as follows:

> The minister of the atonement is set forth in the priest; the means of the atonement in the sacrifice, which is the shedding of blood, or the giving of life for life. Compliance on the part of the sinner with the prescribed ritual, coming to God in His sanctuary, availing himself of the good offices of the high priest, and presenting through him the appointed exchange for his own life; these form the entrance into the life of reconciliation with God. The life itself corresponds with the birth, as it has its legal standing in the same substituted righteousness, and its essential validity in the same inborn faith and repentance. The penitent stands only in the righteousness of the Redeemer, Who makes satisfaction where he has failed, and lives only in the strength of the Sanctifier, Who has enabled him to accept the legal standing thus mercifully vouchsafed, and thenceforth to walk with his God in newness of life.[32]

Murphy gave short shrift to the antisupernaturalism that was vexing the Church at large. His comments in this respect are pertinent.

> The possibility of a revelation involved the wider possibility of a miracle, and thus of creation and prophecy. A logical mind, accepting revelation, will be found accepting with equal readiness all these kindred facts, not perhaps in the popular, but at all events in the Scriptural sense. On the other hand, he who rejects revelation will feel himself bound in consistency to reject the miracle in all its phases. This single point of revelation, then, divides thinking men into two sharply defined classes, those who acknowledge the miraculous in the Scriptural sense and those who repudiate it in some other assumed sense.[33]

Murphy possessed to a remarkable degree what every theologian should strive for, *clarity of thought and precision of statement.* He would have eschewed the subtlety of much modern theology. His was a theology for the pulpit, a theology to be preached.

## WRITINGS

While Dr. Murphy was a distinguished mathematician and classicist it was as a biblical commentator that he made his greatest contribution to Christian scholarship., He wrote seven commentaries: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Psalms, Daniel and Revelation. His best commentaries were those on Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and the Psalms. If his other commentaries are taken into account there is admittedly a certain unevenness in his work. His best work, however, is exceptionally good and was reprinted in America and widely circulated. There it received the most enthusiastic reviews. The *Presbyterian and Theological Review* said, "Dr. Murphy in his commentaries has a definite plan which he carries out. The text is explained, translated anew, and comments are added on the difficult and mooted points. He is a fair, clear, and candid interpreter." The *Methodist Quarterly* agreed: "His style is lucid, animated and often eloquent. His pages afford golden key-thoughts." Concerning Murphy's critical ability *The Lutheran* declared, For "its originality and critical accuracy it must command the high regard of the scholar and theologian, whilst the ease and grace of its style, the judiciousness with which it selects and unfolds its many subjects of discussion will be sure to fix and reward the attention of the general student."[34]

Murphy's method as a commentator was to give a thorough introduction to a book and then, section by section, first to explain Hebrew words occurring for the first time in that book and then give an exposition of the section under review. He provided his own translation of the Hebrew which was always fresh. In addition, he usually arranged his work under a general division of topics. His introductions to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and the Psalms are particularly valuable. It is worth consulting these volumes for this work alone. Although in terms of critical scholarship he is now out of date, his principles of criticism are as relevant and valid as ever. In reading these introductions one cannot help being impressed by the breadth of his scholarship, the soundness of his reasoning and the devotion to his Lord which shines through all his work.

It is no wonder, then, that in recent years some of Murphy's commentaries have again been reprinted in America - Exodus in 1979, Chronicles in 1976 and the Psalms in 1977.[35] It is noteworthy that while Baker Book House used H.C. Leupold's excellent commentary on Genesis in their 1970 printing of "Barnes' Notes on the Old Testament," they have used Murphy's work on Genesis in their attractively produced Heritage Edition of Barnes' Notes, a reprint of the 1873 edition of his work by Estes and Lauriate, Boston. Some of Murphy's commentaries are listed by Professor E.J. Young in the bibliography of his *Introduction to the Old Testament.*

At times Dr Murphy turned his fertile mind in other directions. His reply to Bishop Colenso's 'higher critical' approach to the Pentateuch was quite masterly. Normally of an irenic disposition, he could, when the truth was attacked, be quite trenchant. His reply to Colenso was entitled, "*The nineteen Alleged Impossibilities of Part I of Colenso on the Pentateuch shown to be Possible.*" In twelve short chapters he criticised the bishop on several grounds: "unwarrantable haste in appearing before the public" his work being prepared in less than a year; "culpable inaccuracy in points of Hebrew scholarship, Scriptural knowledge and interpretation"; "unfairness in stating the case of Scripture"; and excessive assumption.

> Our author may wince under our sharp strokes, and the old Adam within him may rebel against them as insulting or injurious. But let him be at peace. He has not scrupled to charge Moses, or "the Scripture writer," with stating what is "not historically true," and has more than once delicately insinuated that men as honourable as himself have ignored facts. We have not done more than this. Our author is not immaculate. He may have whereof to glory before men, but not before God. And is there not cause for severity? This man has, without sufficient ground as we conceive, impugned the veracity of the Holy Scripture, and hastily and rudely shocked the religious faith of the community. Would it be wise or kind not to speak out our hardest thoughts regarding him, when interests of transcendent moment are at stake?[36]

He recognises the conviction and earnestness of Colenso and even his "goodness of intention." "We give him credit for being a man of honour and of truth. But we must take leave to say that Moses also was a man of honour and truth." He concludes that the 'impossibilities' that Colenso professed to find in the books of Moses lay in every case "in his misrepresentation of the narrative, and not in the narrative itself." He offers credible solutions to Colenso's 'impossibilities' and says, "Until, therefore, he has refuted

these solutions, which are new at least to him, we still stand safe on the firm ground of the historical fidelity of the Scripture narrative."

Murphy also wrote *The Human Mind: A System of Mental Philosophy*, *Sacrifice as set forth in Scripture*, in addition to a translation of Kiel's German commentary on the Books of Kings, an edition of the *Shorter Catechism* arranged in sections for use in Bible classes, a Latin Grammar and a Hebrew Grammar. For fifteen years he contributed to *The Christian Irishman* under the nom de plume of 'Comar.' He was known as a contributor to a number of periodicals and journals. Dr. Robert Allen records that on one occasion when a student ventured to complain that he could not understand Murphy's Hebrew Grammar, and sought permission to use that of A.B. Davidson instead, the reply was quick and to the point: "I am here to explain my Grammar."[37]

## EVALUATION

C.H. Spurgeon recognised the value of Murphy's work. In *The Treasury of David* he quotes him twenty-three times, sometimes extensively. Murphy finds a place in Spurgeon's *Commenting and Commentaries*. On Murphy's commentary on Genesis, Spurgeon quotes from a review in the *Evangelical Magazine*, "A work of massive scholarship, abounding in rich and noble thoughts, and remarkably fresh and suggestive" (p. 51). The commentary on Exodus is said to be "the result of laborious study by a scholar of ripe learning" (p. 55). On Murphy's exposition of the Psalms he has this to say:

> This may be called a volume of compressed thought. The author has aimed at neither being too long nor too short. He has succeeded in producing a very useful and usable work, with many points of unusual value. Dr. Murphy is well-known as an accomplished Hebraist and a lucid expositor. (p. 83)[38]

Dr. A.H. Strong in his *Systematic Theology* (p.445) refers to Murphy's rebuttal of the bizarre theory that the "sons of God" in Genesis 6.2 were angels, Murphy contending that they were the descendants of Seth and affirming, "The evil here described is that of promiscuous intermarriage, without regard to spiritual character."

Murphy reached considerable stature as a theologian, Christian apologist, Hebraist and exegete, and the result is work that on the whole is eminently

satisfying and of permanent value. As this article is being prepared for publication we are not sure if Murphy's commentary on Leviticus has been recently reprinted; if not, it deserves to be. It is one of the finest expositions of this book that we have seen, similar in approach to that of Andrew Bonar, but much more detailed.

In the field of biblical interpretation Murphy made a major contribution when he laid down fifteen rules to follow.

> Rule I. The usage of common life determines the meaning of a word or phrase; not that of philosophy.
> Rule II. The usage of the time and place of the writer determines the meaning; not that of any other time; not modern usage.
> Rule III. If a word or phrase had several meanings, the context determines which it bears in a given passage. The more common meaning of the writer's day is to be preferred, provided it suit the passage; not that more common in our day.
> Rule IV. If the author has occasion to employ a new word, or an old word in a new signification, his definition of his usage must determine the meaning; not any other author's usage.
> Rule V. The direct or literal sense of a sentence is the meaning of the author, when no other is indicated; not any figurative, allegorical or mystical meaning.
> Rule VI. Passages bearing a direct, literal, or fully ascertained sense go to determine what passages have another sense than the literal, and what that other sense is; not our opinions.
> Rule VII. A word, phrase, or sentence belonging primarily to the things of man, must be understood, when applied to the things of God, in a sense consistent with his essential nature; not in a sense contradictory of any known attribute of that nature.
> Rule VIII. The meaning of a word or phrase in a later book of Scripture is not to be transferred to an earlier book, unless required by the context.
> Rule IX. The form of a doctrine in a subsequent part of the Bible must not be taken to be as fully developed in a preceding part without the warrant of usage and the context.
> Rule X. The sense of a sentence, and the relation of one sentence to another, must be determined according to the grammar of the language in which it is written.
> Rule XI. The meaning of New Testament words and phrases must be determined in harmony with Old Testament usage; not by Greek against Hebrew usage.
> Rule XII. All Scripture is true historically and metaphysically; not mythical or fallible.

> Rule XIII. In verbally discordant passages that sense is to be adopted which will explain or obviate the discrepancy; not a sense that makes a contradiction. To explain is positively to show the harmony of the passage; to obviate is negatively to show that there is no contradiction.
> Rule XIV. Scripture explains Scripture. Hence the clear and plain passages elucidate the dark and abstruse; not anything foreign to Scripture in time, place, or sentiment; not our philosophy.
> Rule XV. Of rules that cross one another, the higher sets aside or modifies the lower[39]

It is doubtful if any modern writing on the subject of hermeneutics can excel or even equal that outline. These were the rules which Murphy himself clearly followed with remarkable consistency.

In reading Murphy's commentaries one is conscious of the fact that the Christian apologist is always close at hand. The following excerpt from his comments on Genesis 1:1 illustrates the point:

> This simple sentence denies atheism; for it assumes the being of God. It denies polytheism, and, among its various forms, the doctrine of two eternal principles, the one good and the other evil; for it confesses the one Eternal Creator. It denies materialism; for it asserts the creation of matter. It denies pantheism; for it assumes the existence of God before all things, and apart from them. It denies fatalism; for it involves the freedom of the Eternal Being.

Robert Allen notes that Murphy "unlike some commentators . . . could rise at times into a fine English style," but suggests that he did not excel as a teacher and "lacked the gifts of elocution and the fine musical voice possessed by his two brilliant sons" who also served in the Gospel ministry. He adds, however, that Murphy was a man of "endless patience" and had "the application of a trained scholar, the liveliness of an alert mind, gifts of judicious selection and arrangement, and the agreeable virtues of tact and taste." A rather humorous point noted by Allen is that Murphy's eyes were disparate and consequently students were uncertain whether or not they were under his observation in class![40]

James Gracey Murphy was indefatigable in his labours and it is noteworthy that amid his many tasks this distinguished scholar for many years found much pleasure in the religious instruction of Presbyterian children in one of Belfast's primary schools - the Belfast Model School.[41]

In Dr. Murphy's Obituary, which appeared in the *Belfast News-Letter*, 20/4/1896, it was stated that

> He was in the highest sense a model professor, zealous, painstaking and conscientious. He loved his students, and manifested his feelings towards them in his own kind, quiet, unpretentious way, and thus gained their confidence, esteem and affection. It may truly be said that never did a student leave his class with any feeling cherished in his heart but that of genuine affection for him as his professor.

When, owing to failing health, Dr. Murphy was obliged to retire from the active duties of the professoriate, he was presented with an illuminated address which included this sentence: "As a Hebrew scholar of high attainments and an expositor of recognised ability, you have rendered important service to the cause of evangelical truth, and have secured a distinguished place among the theological writers of the day."[42] The *Belfast News-Letter* had this to say of Murphy:

> Dr.Murphy was a voluminous writer, especially in the line of exegesis and criticism. His style is terse and concise, yet withal clear, lucid, and free from pendantry or affectation. His exegesis is simple, convincing, and so plain that even a child might understand his meaning, while, at the same time, he wields the pen of a master hand, every sentence being pregnant of food for the mind, and the breath of a pure evangelicalism wafts over every page of his writings. His criticisms are the outcome of ripe scholarship and a profound study of the sacred writings in their original tongues. He was not carried away with the new-fangled ideas of the higher criticism, but adhered religiously to the old lines, and walked in the old paths of honest, intelligible and convincing criticism, his chief aim being to find what was the mind of the Holy Ghost in the revelation He has given of the truth as it is in Jesus.[43]

At Dr. Murphy's funeral service in Elmwood Presbyterian church, Belfast, 21/4/1896, the Moderator of the General Assembly, Dr. Buick, had this to say:

> As a man, a minister, a friend, a scholar, a professor, an author, he had few equals. He had fine genius, vigour of thought, scholarly tastes and habits, simplicity of nature, and, in a large degree that saintliness of spirit which, more than anything else, make the true theologian. His learning was immense, his judgment sound, his

> temper sunny, and his power of steady perseverance remarkable. He possessed, too, a considerable fund of humour, and his conversation, while instructive, attracted and amused as well by its playfulness and pungency.[44]

At that same service the aged and infirm Professor Killen felt compelled to pay tribute to his friend and colleague. Killen had assisted in Murphy's ordination in Ballyshannon.

> He had witnessed his behaviour in the bloom of youth, and in the decay of age, in sickness and in health, in days of rejoicing and in times of sadness; and throughout all those changes he had exhibited the same characteristics, the same truthfulness and integrity, the same confidence in the good providence of God and the same trust in the almighty and eternal Father. Dr. Murphy was one of the most learned men connected with the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and yet he was known to those who came in contact with him to be as humble and unassuming as any of his brethren.[45]

A man of slight build, walking with a limp as the result of an accident in his youth, yet of distinguished bearing and noble character, Murphy was an all-round scholar who, under God, adorned his office. He deserves to be rediscovered, not unjustly forgotten.

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12. Robert Allen op. cit., p.51. Until 1849, when Queen's College was opened in Belfast, R.B.A.I. had a collegiate department and thus teachers had professorial status. Its General Certificate was recognised as the equivalent of a university degree.
13. Ibid.,
14. Ibid.,
15. Robert Allen, op. cit., pp.61, 62.
16. Ibid., p.80
17. Ibid., p.82.
18. Ibid., p.86. The College was officially opened on 5th., December 1853, Dr. J.H. Merle D'Aubigne, the distinguished Swiss Church historian, being the guest lecturer.
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20. See Bardon, op. cit., pp.80 and 106. For six years prior to the erection of Assembly's College (now Union College) classes were held in local churches.
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# THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

**by Hugh J. Blair**

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It seems that theologians have given comparatively scant attention to one of God's attributes, His faithfulness. And yet it stands out in the Old Testament as a constant background to the history of His people. Again and again this is the attribute of God that His people turn to instinctively in times of crisis. In spite of everything, God can be relied on. The New Testament in turn applies this basic doctrine to a wide variety of experience, and confirms its lasting relevance.

A. J. Gossip more than sixty years ago published a sermon with the title, "The Last Line of Defence."[1] The final argument in Scripture, he said, the last line of defence on which men fall back when darkness falls on life, and things grow tangled and bewildering is the faithfulness of God. You can rely on God. That message is still supremely relevant in these stormy days in which we live. When things everywhere are being shaken, this truth is sure; God is faithful; you can rely on Him.

This article will look at the greatness of God's faithfulness, and in particular at a moment in Israel's history when that faithfulness was the one thing to hold on to in a cloudy and dark day. The faithfulness of God will be seen as basically faithfulness to His promise. Then some of the New Testament references will be considered as giving practical illustrations of the relevance of the faithfulness of God to His people's needs.

## GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS

The proclamation "Great is Thy Faithfulness" comes from a book that is set in the midst of disaster, the Book of Lamentations. The background of that book is a scene of violence and destruction, the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B. C. Much of the book gives in horrifying detail something of what that destruction meant, and the anguish that it caused. It is not suffering in general that is in view: it is personal suffering. The word

'I' occurs in verse after verse. The heart knows its own bitterness - the starvation, the fear, and the shame, too, for this had come on Jerusalem because its people had turned away from God. Then in the midst of a catalogue of anguish there comes this verse: "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope." What could give hope in face of such desolation? This: "Great is Thy faithfulness." When the message of God's faithfulness comes to us from the context of suffering and pain, we have to listen.

The Hebrew word translated 'faithfulness'[2] means something absolutely stedfast, something that can be depended on to the uttermost. It is the word used to describe Moses' hands when they were upheld on the top of the hill by Aaron and Hur: "Moses' hands were steady until the going down of the sun." It is the word used in II Kings 18:16 to describe the pillars in the house of the Lord. God's faithfulness is sure and stedfast.

Another English word that is linked with the Hebrew word for 'faithfulness' is 'Amen'. 'Amen' means 'So be it' or 'It is so'. When Paul writes in II Corinthians 1:20 that all the promises of God are 'Yes' and 'Amen' in Christ, he is saying that they are absolutely sure and can be depended on to the uttermost.

When Christ in His teaching emphasised what He was saying by declaring, "Verily, verily, I say unto you," He used the same word: "Amen, Amen, I say unto you." What He said was absolutely trustworthy. He Himself is recognised in heaven as 'The Amen, the faithful and true witness' (Revelation 3:14). It is in Christ that we see the faithfulness of God made flesh, here in reality for our need.

The greatness of God's faithfulness is underlined by the use of a Hebrew word meaning 'great in size'. We can never come to the end of it. When Nansen, the famous Arctic explorer, came to take soundings one day in the Frozen North, he bored as usual through the ice and let down his sounding-line. Down and down it went, but it did not reach the bottom. Another line was added and yet another, until all the lines in the ship were tied together and let down, and even then they failed to reach the ocean bed. That night when Nansen came to write his records for the day, this is what he wrote: "3500 fathoms, and deeper than that:" God's faithfulness is great beyond all our measuring.

Note that in Lamentations 3:23 the writer speaks of 'Thy faithfulness.' The previous verse speaks of 'the Lord's mercies' and 'the Lord's compassions': '*His*' mercies, '*His*' compassions. But when the writer speaks of God's faithfulness, he comes closer, face to face, not talking about the Lord now, but talking to him: '*Thy*' faithfulness. We must get as close as that, face to face, setting the faithfulness of God in the context of our own situation. "Great is Thy faithfulness" - *to me*.

The verbs that follow in the passage in Lamentations all indicate implicit trust as the one fitting response to God's faithfulness: 'wait'; 'hope'; 'seek'. God's faithfulness means that He is trustworthy; therefore the one response to Him is trust.

## THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD SEEN IN PROMISE AND FULFILMENT

The story of the Bible is the story of Promise and Fulfilment. In the Old Testament promise is seen as looking forward; in the New Testament it is seen as fulfilled in Christ. One Old Testament scholar puts it like this:

> When we survey the entire Old Testament we find ourselves involved in a great history of movement from promise to fulfilment. It flows like a large brook here running swiftly, there apparently coming to rest in a quiet backwater and yet moving forward as a whole towards a distant goal which lies beyond itself.[3]

Fulfilment in the New Testament is not complete. We still look for a new heaven and a new earth. We see not yet all things put under man, but we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour. The whole Bible speaks of promise and fulfilment.

We can be sure of fulfilment, for God is faithful. He keeps His word. It is significant that there is no special word in Hebrew for 'promise' in the Old Testament, just two words, one meaning 'word' and the other meaning 'saying'. God keeps His word, and God fulfils what He has said. He must, for He is a faithful God.

It will be helpful to concentrate on Abraham and Sarah as examples of God's faithfulness seen in promise and fulfilment. It is the name of Sarah

that is especially underlined in the New Testament as recognising God's faithfulness as the guarantee of His promise: "By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful Who had promised". (Hebrews 11:11).

Romans 4:18 confirms Abraham's faith in the promise: "Abraham, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, 'so shall your descendants be.' And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was able to perform".

Sarah by faith believed that God was faithful Who had promised. Abraham by faith was fully convinced that what God had promised He was able also to perform. They were both sure of God's faithfulnss to His promise. Let us look in more detail at their faith in the promise of a faithful God.

*1. For Abraham and Sarah faith in God's promise was faith in the promise of a son.*

The faith of Sarah was faith in God's promise. She believed that God was trustworthy, and so she believed in His promise. She did not come naturally or easily to that faith. Indeed, when she first heard of God's promise that she and Abraham would have a son, she laughed in unbelief. It was impossible that she, ninety years old and past the age of child-bearing, could have a son. She laughed at the possibility.

Ronald S. Wallace in a careful study of the three questions put to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18 puts part of the blame for Sarah's unbelieving laughter on Abraham.[4] The angel who came to repeat God's promise to Abraham that he would have a son, asked Abraham the question,"Where is Sarah thy wife?" (v.9). Abraham answered, "Here, in the tent." The fact seems to be that Sarah had to hear of God's wonderful promise only through overhearing it at the tent door. Abraham had heard it weeks before, (chapter 15 ), and had believed it: that act of faith was counted to him for righteousness. And yet it seems that he had not told

Sarah. Ronald Wallace sees the question addressed to Abraham, "Where is Sarah your wife?" as a rebuke to him for his failure to share the good news with her. And the second question, again addressed to Abraham rather than to Sarah, was also an implied rebuke: "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?" It was Abraham's fault, according to this reading of the situation, that Sarah laughed in unbelief.

Unbelief was answered in the third question, addressed in grace to both of them: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" And He Himself answered that question by repeating the promise: "At the appointed time I will return to you...and Sarah shall have a son." When that promise was fulfilled, Sarah laughed again, in a completely different way, and she commemorated her laughter in the name she gave her son, Isaac, meaning Laughter. The laughter of unbelief had changed to the laughter of thankful astonishment. And all because she judged him faithful Who had promised.

The faith of Abraham was faith in God's power. God's power is power to do what on human terms is quite impossible. Humanly speaking, Abraham and Sarah could never have a son. But as we have it in Romans 4, Abraham "did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised." What God has promised He is able also to do. That is the note of faith that rings out throughout the New Testament. He is able: Faith says, "He is able" and rests on that.

Sarah's faith was faith in God's promise: Abraham's faith was in God's power to keep His promise. The New Testament takes it a stage further and sees their faith as faith in God's Christ. For Abraham and Sarah God's promise was fulfilled in Isaac and in the multitude of his descendants. But the ultimate fulfilment of the promise of a son was beyond anything that Abraham could have imagined. For, as Paul argues in Galations 3:16, the promise of a seed - singular, not plural - was fulfilled not in the many descendants of Abraham, but in One, the Lord Jesus Christ. The multitude of Abraham's descendants, because of sin, could not fulfil and did not fulfil the purpose that God had of bringing blessing to the whole world through Abraham's seed. But one perfect descendant of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ, could and did. The promise of a faithful God was perfectly fulfilled in Christ.

*2. The New Testament very significantly underlines another aspect of Abraham's and Sarah's faith: it is faith in the promise of life from the dead.*

So far as being able to produce children was concerned, Abraham and Sarah were dead. Abraham faced the fact that "his body was as good as dead - since he was about a hundred years old - and that Sarah's womb was also dead" (Romans 4:19, NIV). But they believed God's promise that there would be life from the dead. Romans 4 goes on immediately to say that that faith of Abraham - faith in God's ability to bring life from the dead - was imputed as righteousness to Abraham. Then Paul brings that kind of faith right into a New Testament setting:

> "Now it was not written for his sake alone (that is, Abraham's sake alone) that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead (Romans 4:23,24, NKJV)."

Abraham's faith was saving faith, faith that gives righteousness, because He believed that God could bring life from the dead. Our faith is saving faith when we believe that God raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead. Saving faith for us is faith in the One Who came to mediate blessing to the world and faith in the One Who was raised from the dead.

God's faithfulness to His promise is finally seen in His raising of Christ from the dead. That was Paul's message to his hearers in Pisidian Antioch:

> "We declare to you glad tidings - that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus" (Acts 13:32,33, NKJV).

The faithfulness of God is seen ultimately in Christ's resurrection, and our faith in that faithfulness makes us right with God.

Faith in the promise of life from the dead has the same marks as the promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah. It was faith in God's promise. What had Abraham and Sarah to go on when they trusted God? One thing only: His word. God had promised and that was enough. What was the message that transformed the lives of thousands in the early chapters of the book of Acts? The apostles brought the same message, confirmed by many witnesses, that God had raised Christ from the dead. Faith meant believing

that message, and trusting a living Saviour to save from sin.

That was not only faith in God's promise: it was faith in God's power. At first, as we have seen, Sarah laughed at the possibility that God's promise could come true. But God challenged her laughter: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Nothing! For His power is all-powerful. There were those in Athens who scoffed at the possibility of resurrection from the dead: "When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked." The answer to such mockery is the exceeding greatness of God's mighty power, which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead (Ephesians 1:19,20). Abraham's and Sarah's faith in the promise of a son was ultimately faith in Christ: their faith in the promise of life from the dead was ultimately faith in a Risen Saviour.

Abraham confirmed his faith in a faithful God Who could give life from the dead when he was willing to offer up Isaac, "accounting that God was able to raise up even from the dead" (Hebrews 11:19, literally translated: 'him' is not in the original text). The beginning of Abraham's faith was faith in the faithfulness of God to give life from the dead. His faith was reasserted when in face of the call to sacrifice Isaac he accounted that God was able to raise up even from the dead. For us, God's faithfulness to His promise - to all His promises - is proved in that He raised up Christ from the dead. Faith in a faithful God ultimately rests on that. If Christ is not risen, our faith is vain.

## NEW TESTAMENT APPLICATIONS OF THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD TO PRACTICAL NEEDS

Having looked at the greatness of God's faithfulness, and having seen that faithfulness is manifested in His keeping of His promise - a promise ultimately fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ - the question now is, What does God's faithfulness mean for us? What in practical terms does it mean for us that God is faithful? The answer is found in New Testament passages which tell what God's faithfulness means for His people.

One of the New Testament verses which speaks of God's faithfulness is 1 Thessalonians 5:24: "He Who calls you is faithful, Who also will do it." The A.V. prints the word 'it' at the end of the verse in italics, indicating that there is no word in the original Greek corresponding to it. The text reads,

"He Who calls you is faithful, Who also will do." Do what? Anything and everything! It can be illustrated by a blank cheque. If we want to make a gift to a friend whom we love and whose judgment we can trust, we can write out a blank cheque. It bears his name and our signature, but the amount is not specified. That is determined by the recipient. God gives us many blank cheques like that in the Bible. For example, Psalm 37:5: "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass." But again 'it' is in italics. "He shall bring to pass" - what? Whatever we need. God is faithful, to do what? He is faithful to meet all our needs.

*1. God's faithfulness deals with our testing and temptation*

I Corinthians 10:13 can be translated in two ways: "God is faithful, Who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." Or, "God is faithful, and He will not allow you to be tested more than you can stand, but with the testing He will also make a way out, that you may be able to bear it."

The word 'tempt' in the Bible is used in two senses: it can mean 'to test' and it can mean 'to seduce to do evil'. That comes out very clearly in the first chapter of the Epistle of James. In verse 2 James says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into different temptations." He does not mean that we should be glad when we experience different kinds of temptation to evil. He does mean that we should welcome the testings of life. And so he goes on in verse 12 to say, "Blessed is the man who endures testing, for when he is tested, he shall receive the crown of life." But verse 13 refers to something different: "Let no man say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted of God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone."

The Corinthians could have told us that testing can sometimes become temptation. Every day that they lived in the seductive atmosphere of Corinth was a testing time for the Christians there. Would they conform to the evil life that was all around them? Their testing could easily pass into temptation to evil. But it need not do so. Here is God's promise to a believer in such a situation: "God is faithful who will not allow you to be tested (and tempted) beyond what you are able, but with the testing (and the temptation) will also make the way of escape that you may be able to bear it."

God in His faithfulness deals with temptation in two ways. First, He

limits it. "He will not allow you to be tested (or tempted) beyond what you are able." He limits it. He does more. He makes a way of escape. The Greek word translated 'the way of escape' conjures up two vivid pictures. One is of a group of soldiers hemmed in, in a narrow defile, with every way of escape closed up. And yet in the morning the narrow gully is empty, for a way out has been found. The other picture is "of a tiny craft, apparently doomed to shipwreck on an unbroken line of cliff, suddenly, and to the inexperiencd landsman, unexpectedly, slipping through a gap in the inhospitable coast into security and peace."[5] Whatever picture comes more readily to mind, the reality is clear. Always we can trust our faithful God to open up the way of escape.

*2. God's faithfulness deals with our suffering*

The first Epistle of Peter has much to say about suffering. In chapter 4, verse 19 he sets it in the context of the faithfulness of God: "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator." Here is God's message for the Christian who is called to pass through suffering: it is according to the will of God. If suffering comes into our lives only through blind chance, there is nothing to help us to bear it. But if it comes through the will of a loving Father, then it can be borne.

How can we bear it? We can commit ourselves and our suffering to Him. The word used was applied to banking, the handing over and depositing of something for safe keeping. Christ Himself knew that source of consolation in the moment of immeasurable suffering: "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit."

But the greatest consolation in suffering is this: we are committing the keeping of our suffering and of ourselves to a faithful Creator. God is more than faithful. He is a faithful Creator. He has a plan and a purpose in what He is doing. He is going to make something of us, and suffering may be one of the methods that He uses. The finest steel is tempered in the fiercest fires, and in the fire we can trust a faithful Creator.

*3. God's faithfulness meets our need for protection from the evil that confronts us*

The promise of such protection is in II Thessalonians 3:3: "The Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from evil (or, from the evil

one)." Paul, as he often does, asks for prayer for himself, or rather for the word that he is called to preach: "Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified." He realises that that word will inevitably meet with opposition, and he goes on, "and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men." Paul is a realist; he knows that he is living in a world that will be hostile to the gospel. All men do not have faith, and an unbelieving world will confront the gospel head on. But immediately he has something to set over against that: "Not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful."

The faithfulness of God has two wonderful consequences for His people who are confronted by evil. Note that Paul is not thinking first and foremost about himself and the threats that come against him from evil men. He says, "The Lord is faithful, Who will establish you, and guard you from the evil one." He is thinking more about the evils that threaten his friends in Thessalonica than he is about himself.

The first consequence of God's faithfulness for those who are challenged by evil is this: "He will establish you." It means, "He will give you a strong base from which to repel the enemy." Psalm 40:2 has the right way of it: "He set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps."

The second consequence of God's faithfulness for those who are challenged by evil is protection: "He will protect you from evil." It is true of every form of evil that threatens us. The Lord is faithful and He will protect us.

*4. God's faithfulness deals with our loneliness*

Christians in Corinth were in a tiny minority. But they did not need to feel lonely. Paul writes to them in I Corinthians 1:9: "God is faithful, by Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." The first part of that verse gives the basis of all that God's faithfulness means to us: "God is faithful by Whom you were called." That echoes what we have heard already in I Thessalonians 5:24: "He Who calls you is faithful, Who also will do it." God called us in the first place: then we can count on Him to do for us everything that we need.

There is one special application that comes out of the second part of the verse: "He called us into fellowship." There was a girl who went on a holiday cruise in the Mediterranean. She was a very quiet, reserved girl, and

some of her friends wondered if she would enjoy that kind of a holiday. The ship called in at several ports on its itinerary, and the people who were travelling with her were amazed to see that in every place where they called she seemed to have friends. The fact was that she was a Christian, and wherever she went she made contact with whatever group of Christians was there. She could have been a very lonely person if it had not been for the fellowship about which Paul is speaking here, "the fellowship of our Lord Jesus Christ." That means two things. It means fellowship with Him. We can never be lonely when we have that. It also means the fellowship that we share with other believers, the fellowship that unites us to others because we are united to Him. It is God's faithfulness that guarantees fellowship with Christ, and fellowship with His people.

*5. God's faithfulness meets our need for holiness of life*

Paul near the close of his first letter to the Thessalonians lists some of the things that are part of living a holy life: "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks. Abstain from every form of evil." And perhaps our first reaction is, "I could never live a life like that." Of course we could not, if we had to do it by ourselves. But we are not left to ourselves. Paul goes on to tell us where holiness of life comes from: "Now may the God of peace Himself" - and the word 'Himself' is emphatic at the beginning of the verse - "sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thessalonians 5:23). Could anything be more comprehensive than that? Three words underline the completeness of the sanctification that is in view: "May the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely." "May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept." Every part of life is affected. "Be kept blameless". "Completely"; "whole"; "blameless" - these words sum up the perfection of the sanctification that a faithful God has in mind for us. But is that perfection of sanctification possible? Here is the guarantee of it: "He Who calls you is faithful, Who also will do it." We can trust Him to do it, and one day it will be perfect. Where there is imperfection, as there always is in this life, God's faithfulness deals with that: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (I John 1:9). He is faithful to forgive. He is faithful to all the promises given in Scripture of forgiveness for the repentant. He is faithful to His covenant with Christ our Substitute, Who bore our sins in His own body on the Cross. God is faithful to forgive. But He does not stop with forgiveness. His faithfulness goes beyond forgiveness for sin to cleansing from sin: "He is faithful...to cleanse us from

all unrighteousness." That cleansing will be perfect when we are presented "before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24), and a faithful God will have made holiness complete.

*6. God's faithfulness meets our need for stedfastness*

The perfection of holiness may seem like a long way off, but there is one thing that we are required to do throughout our pilgrimage to the fulfilment of that hope. Hebrews 10:23 tells us what it is: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering." God asks us to be stedfast. But do you think we can? Here is our encouragement: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He is faithful Who promised." The faithfulness of God meets our need for the stedfastness that He requires.

A boy climbing up the rock face with his father was perhaps more of a Calvinist than he realised. His anxious mother called after him, "Johnny, have you got hold of your father's hand?" "No," said Johnny, "but my father has got hold of mine." That is it. We can hold fast, because He is holding fast. "He is faithful Who promised." We can rely on that.

At Sinai, as recorded in Exodos 34:6, God proclaimed His very nature as "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in stedfast love and faithfulness." His compassion, His undeserved favour, His longsuffering, are all vital for His people. But the attributes that are specially underlined as being abundant are His stedfast love and His faithfulness. We need them all, but most of all, from beginning to end, we need His grace and His faithfulness.[6]

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2. A previous article in the Reformed Theological Journal - vol.5, 1989 - entitled, 'Preaching from the Hebrew Bible', dealt with the Hebrew word for 'faithfulness' with special reference to its context in Lamentations 3:21ff.
3. W. Zimmerli, 'Promise and Fulfilment' in Essays on Old Testament Intrpretation.
4. Ronald S. Wallace, *Abraham*, Genesis 12 - 23, SPCK, pp.76ff.
5. I have not been able to recall the source of this quotation, but it gives a wonderful illustration of the Greek 'ekbasis'.
6. 'Faithfulness' at the end of Exodos 34:6 is a better translation than 'truth'. All the other attributes of God referred to in the verse are describing what He is to His people. 'Truth' is what He is in Himself: 'faithfulness' is what He is to His people.

# WAS CALVIN A FEDERALIST?

**by Paul Helm**

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In a number of writings Professor J. B. Torrance has argued that the federal theology of later Calvinism and Puritanism (the theology expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, for example, as well as the Confessions that derived from it, such as the Savoy Declaration and the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689) is a significant departure from the theology of Calvin. More than this, it represents an overturning of Calvin's theology. Not a development of it, but a degeneration. In a recent paper 'The Concept of Federal Theology - Was Calvin a Federal Theologian?' (In *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor* ed. W.H.Neuser (Grand Rapids,Mich., Eerdmans, 1994) Professor Torrance conveniently summarises his reasons for holding this view. In what follows an attempt will be made to respond to it.

The centrepiece of his article is a 7-point critique of federal theology. At issue in the question of whether Calvin was a federalist is the doctrine of God and our understanding of grace. We shall consider these points one by one, in the order in which Professor Torrance presents them. There is reason to think that Professor Torrance has given an inaccurate account of both the teaching of Calvin, and of federal theology, and in so doing has polarised the two positions instead of seeing them as variants of one theological type.

## I

Before we examine Professor Torrance's 7-point critique it is necessary to make some general observations on the views that he ascribes to the various theologians which he then polarises against the view of Calvin. There is reason to believe that he is not always accurate in the way in which he represents them, and that the somewhat cavalier treatment of the sources may have unwittingly led him astray. I shall take as an example his treatment of William Perkins' thought as found in his *The Golden Chaine*.

As part of his overall account of federal theology Torrance says this about Perkins:

> In *The Golden Chaine*, Perkins expounds the two covenants of works and of grace as the stages in which God executes the decree of election, identifying the two stages as those of first Law and then Gospel. The Law is the schoolmaster by which God brings the elect to salvation. The Bezan predestination system, and the western *ordo salutis* are being brought together in the practical mind of the Puritan, pastorally concerned about 'law work' and the salvation of the elect. So in ch. 19 'Concerning the outward means of executing the decree of election, and of the Decalogue', he says, 'The means are God's covenant and the seal thereof. *God's covenant is his contract with man, concerning eternal life, upon certain conditions.* The covenant consisteth of two parts: God's promise to man, man's promise to God. God's promise to man is that whereby he bindeth himself to man to be his God, if he break not the condition. Man's promise to God is that whereby he voweth his allegiance unto his Lord, and to perform the conditions between them. *Again there are two kinds of this covenant. The covenant of works and the covenant of grace* (Jer.31.31, 42.43). The covenant of works is God's covenant made with condition of perfect obedience and is expressed in the moral law'. Then in ch.31, 'Of the covenant of grace', he says, 'Hitherto concerning the covenant of works, and the law, now followeth the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace, is that whereby God, freely promising Christ and his benefits, exacteth again of man that he would by faith receive Christ and repent of his sins' (Hos.32.18; Ezk.36.25; Mal.3.1) .
>
> Here, as in Fenner's *Theologa Sacra*, the covenant of grace is interpreted as a sub-species of covenant as a contract with conditions. Such a doctrine of the conditionality of the covenant of grace paves the way for a concept of repentance as a condition of grace - 'legal repentance', which Calvin so vigorously attached (sc.) in the *Institutio* III.ch.3. (*Op. cit.*, footnote 13, pp.24-5).

There are several important inaccuracies in this account.

First, in Chapter XI of *The Golden Chaine* Perkins deals with man's fall and disobedience. One might expect him, from Professor Torrance's account, to expound the Fall in terms of the covenant of works, or at least refer to the idea of the covenant of works. But in fact Perkins makes no reference whatsoever to the covenant of works in this chapter.

Second, in Chapter XIX there is, as Professor Torrance says, reference to the covenant of works. But this expression does not refer to God's original relation with Adam which, as just noted, Perkins does not mention in that connection. This should alert us to the fact that the phrase 'covenant of works' is used by Perkins in a rather different way from that used, say, in the Westminster Confession of Faith. In fact, he uses it to describe the Mosaic economy, or to be more precise, to describe one aspect of the Mosaic economy. 'The covenant of works, is God's covenant, made with condition of perfect obedience, and is expressed in the moral law' (*The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ, William Perkins*, London , 1626, Vol.I p.32). That is, the covenant of works is embodied in the 'Do this and live' motif found so prominently in the history of the nation of Israel.

The other aspect of the Mosaic economy is the covenant of grace. In Chapter XXXI 'The Covenant of Grace', he says

> The covenant, albeit it be one in substance, yet is it distinguished into the old and the new testament. The old testament or covenant is that, which in types and shadows prefigured Christ to come, and to be exhibited. The new testament declareth Christ already come in the flesh, and is apparently shewed in the Gospel. (*op.cit.* p.70)

So there are two temporal phases to the covenant of grace, a typical phase and an anti-typical phase; but in the history of Israel the typical phase occurs alongside and is intermingled with the corresponding phase of the covenant of works. For Perkins both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace exist in parallel fashion, in both the Old Testament and the New, and each is to be distinguished from the original arrangement with Adam, which is not described as a 'covenant', not at least by Perkins.

So when Professor Torrance quotes Perkins from Ch.XIX , and draws our attention to the fact that the covenant consists of two parts, and to the mutually conditional character of the covenant, these are features of the covenant of works, *in Perkins' sense*, but not of the covenant of grace, nor of the original arrangement made with Adam. Neither the covenant of grace, nor the original arrangement made with Adam is conditional, much less mutually conditional, in Perkins' view. It is only the covenant of works (as Perkins understands it) in which the language of conditionality enters. This is borne out by the fact that when Perkins discusses the covenant of grace (Ch. XXXI) the language of conditionality is completely absent

> ...In this covenant we do not so much offer or promise any great matter to God, as in a manner only receive.....The end and use of the Gospel is, first to manifest that righteousness in Christ, whereby the whole law is fully satisfied, and salvation attained. Secondly, it is the instrument, and, as it were, the conduit pipe of the holy Ghost, to fashion and derive faith unto the soul: by which faith, they which believe, do, as with an hand, apprehend Christ's righteousness (p.70.)

One might say, had Perkins set out deliberately to choose language specifically to refute the charge that the covenant of grace had a conditional character he could not have chosen language better than this.

Incidentally, a similar mistake is made in another recent article, 'The Perkinsian Moment of Federal Theology' (*Calvin Theological Journal*, Vol.29 No.1, April 1994). In this article Michael McGiffert claims that Perkinsian federal theology sowed the seeds of antinomianism, even though McGiffert recognises that in his insistence on the law's 'third use' for believers, its use as a rule of life, 'Perkins' writings supplied strong antidotes to heterodoxy' (pp.123-4).

What was basically wrong with Perkins' views, according to McGiffert, was that he asserted that 'the two Testaments, the Law and the Gospel, are two in nature, substance, and kind' (p.121). Perkins used the antithesis between the law and the gospel to correct the 'popish' error

> that the law of Moses and the Gospel are all one law for substance and that the difference lies in this, that the law of Moses is dark and imperfect and the Gospel, or the law of Christ, more perfect. (Perkins, quoted by McGiffert, p.122)

As we have seen, as Perkins uses the phrase 'the covenant of works' the earlier quotation faithfully reflects Perkins' view of the Mosaic economy of law. But it is quite inaccurate for McGiffert to imply that the criticisms Perkins made of the inadequacy of the Mosaic economy of law apply automatically to the original Adamic administration. This confusion can be seen in a passage such as the following

> Such men, including such Puritan lights as John Preston, Richard Sibbes and William Pemble, appealed in Sibbes's words 'from Sinai to Sion, from the Law to the Gospel, from Moses to Christ'. Advancing the covenant of grace as 'the main point that the

> ministers of the Gospel can deliver', they poised it against the *Adamic-Mosaic covenant*, which as both premise and consequence they loaded with the law's doom' (p.124, emphasis added).

But in Perkins' way of thinking there is no such thing as 'the Adamic-Mosaic covenant'; there is, as we have seen, the original Adamic administration, and the Mosaic covenant 'Do this and live', which Perkins refers to as 'the covenant of works'.

Professor Torrance is therefore incorrect in supposing that Perkins expounds the covenant of works and the covenant of grace as two diffferent species of the same genus, and as occupying successive temporal phases in the history of redemption, the first covenant being made with unfallen Adam, the second with fallen mankind. Rather for Perkins the covenant of works and the covenant of grace are two temporally parallel ways in which men may at any time seek salvation. The one, the covenant of works, is conditional, and invariably fails because fallen man cannot comply with the condition in question; the other, the covenant of grace, invariably succeeds in the case of the elect, both in its typical form under the Old Testament, and in its anti-typical form in the New.(As Perkins' puts it in Ch.XVIII "Of Christ's Nativity and Office", referring to Christ's need of circumcision 'He is the knot and bond of both covenants' (p.26)).The death of Christ 'was necessary, that he might confirm to us the Testament, or Covenant of grace for our sakes'. (p.29)

So the covenant of grace is not a subspecies of covenant defined as a contract between partners with mutual conditions to be fulfilled. There is no conditionality in Perkins' covenant of grace, as we have seen. Or perhaps we should say, (though he does not put it this way), such conditionality as there is in the covenant of grace is accepted and performed by Jesus Christ.

Perkins is only one writer to whom Professor Torrance refers , the first that I happened to turn to. But his treatment of Perkins does suggest that Professor Torrance has come to the text of his writings with an *a priori* idea of what he will find there. The reality, as we have seen, is very different. This should alert us to the fact that the puritan theologians varied in their use of terminology among themselves, and to the danger of reading their varied and voluminous writings with only one meaning of, say the expression 'the covenant of works' in mind. And of course it should make us wary of accepting Professor Torrance's interpretations of the other federal theologians.

## II

Let us now consider Professor Torrance's seven theological points in order.

(1.) As we have just noted, a fundamental aspect of Professor Torrance's critique of federal theology is that it interpreted the Fall in terms of a covenant of works, something that neither Scripture nor Calvin does. He makes the point that for Calvin there is only one covenant, the covenant of grace (quoting Calvin's comments on Jeremiah 31.31), and that Calvin distinguishes between two different forms of this one covenant. Calvin is silent on the question of whether there is a prior covenant of works. Further, in the *Institutes* (1559) Calvin places his treatment of the law within Book Two, which deals with our knowledge of God as redeemer.(Whereas, it is alleged, the covenant theologians taught a covenant of works, and saw Sinai as a re-publication of that covenant in its original terms). These charges do not apply to William Perkins, as we have seen. Indeed Perkins and Calvin are much closer together, both in terminology and theology, than Professor Torrance suggests.

Let us suppose for the moment that Calvin did not teach such a covenant of works, and agree that the federal theologians did, though we have seen reason to doubt that Perkins did. How does Calvin account for the fact that the race is guilty before God in virtue of both original and actual sin? His answer is that there was a Fall of Adam and that in some way, (though - we are assuming - not in virtue of a federal relationship), the race fell when Adam fell. Did Calvin deny that the Fall resulted from disobedience to the law of God? It does not seem so. Calvin says this about the Fall

> Adam was denied the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to test his obedience and prove that he was willingly under God's command....the promise by which he was bidden to hope for eternal life so long as he ate from the tree of life, and, conversely, the terrible threat of death once he tasted of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, served to prove and exercise his faith. (p.245)

As we have seen, Perkins' language in *The Golden Chaine* is not significantly different from this.

A further question arises from what Professor Torrance claims: did the federal theologians teach that Adam discerned his duty by the light of

reason and mutually contracted with God, who agreed to grant him eternal life if he obeyed? Here again caution must be exercised. For instance, the Westminster Confession, in its chapters on the Fall and on the Covenant (VI and VII) does not say anything about how Adam discerned his duty. But let us suppose that it did, and that this is implied in what it taught. The covenant theologians also taught that reason and conscience are part of man's natural endowment, and that fallen mankind retains vestiges of these original powers. A person's conscience tells him that he is a sinner. To say that Adam discerned his duty by the light of reason would not, for the covenant theologians, be misleading, since Adam's reason is part of the image of God in him. So 'the light of reason' here is something very different from how that phrase was understood by, say, the thinkers of the Enlightenment a century or so later. 'Reason' and 'nature', for the covenant theologians, are God-given, and are not ways in which truth may be discerned independently of God.

As we have seen in the case of Perkins, the federal theologians (if that is what Perkins was) did not teach that the Adamic arrangement was a mutual arrangement between equal partners. That arrangement was instituted by God, and could not have been instituted by man. Nor did they teach that the law of God was discerned by an independent use of reason, but that a specific command was given by God not to eat of the tree, a command that is not contained in the decalogue. For example, The Westminster Confession of Faith says

> The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. (VII.II)

There is in fact no suggestion here that the law of God was discerned by reason, but the reverse of this. For according to the Confession the law of God was written on the hearts of the first pair, as the Confession elsewhere explicitly teaches (IV.II)

Secondly, it is unfair to say that Calvin's teaching on the law was confined to the context of redemption. For whatever the differences between Calvin and the federal theologians they are all theologians of one general type. For all of them Christ's redemption can only be understood in terms of a prior fall from original righteousness. It is true that in the *Institutes* a treatment of the *decalogue* occurs in the context of redemption,

because Calvin was concerned to stress his view that the law is the rule of life for believers. Yet in the quotation given above Calvin explicitly refers to the part played in the Fall by the command of God. This is not the command of Sinai, but it is the command of God not to eat of the tree, and presumably as law-like as any of the commands of God. And on obedience or otherwise to this command turned God's relationship with the first pair. Whether or not it is appropriate to call this arrangement between the Lord and the first pair a 'covenant' (and let us suppose that it is not appropriate) it is clear that had Adam not transgressed the command of God he would have been blessed, and that upon transgressing he was cursed.

We must not confuse words with concepts. Calvin did not use the words 'covenant of works' to refer to the original arrangement, and nor, as we have seen, did William Perkins. And it may be that this fact is historically or theologically significant. But the absence of the phrase, even a repudiation of it, does not imply a repudiation of federal theology. As conservative a Reformed theologian as John Murray, with the whole of the covenant theology tradition in view, refused to use the expression 'covenant of works', but it would be extremely hazardous, and indeed plainly false, to suppose that Murray was not a federal theologian, that he did not think that had Adam kept the command of God not to eat of the tree then the entire human race would have been rewarded 'in Adam'. This is what Murray wrote:

> The Adamic administration is, therefore, construed as an administration in which God, by a special act of providence, established for man the provision whereby he might pass from the status of contingency to one of confirmed and indefectible holiness and blessedness, that is, from *posse peccare* and *posse non peccare* to *non posse peccare*. The way instituted was that of 'an intensified and concentrated probation', the alternative issues being dependent upon the issues of obedience or disobedience. (Cf. G.Vos: *Biblical Theology*, 22f.)
>
> This administration has often been denoted 'The Covenant of Works'. There are two observations. (1) The term is not felicitous, for the reason that the elements of grace entering into the administration are not properly provided for by the term 'works'. (2) It is not designated a covenant in Scripture. (*Collected Writings*, Edinburgh, 1977, Vol.2 p.49. )

So it does not follow from their unwillingness to use the words 'covenant of works' that Calvin and Perkins, any more than John Murray,

did not think that the arrangement that God made when he created Adam suspended Adam's blessing, and that of the entire race, upon his obedience to the command of God.

Professor Torrance alleges that the teaching of an Adamic arrangement, whether expressed in terms of a covenant of works (as with the Westminster Confession) or in some other way (as in the case of Calvin and Perkins and John Murray) implies the subordination of grace to law. But we must also be careful here; there is one sense in which the one was subordinated to the other, but another sense in which it was not. It was subordinated in that historically the covenant of grace followed the Fall, and the Fall resulted from disobedience to the command of God. This may be called historical subordination. But in the will of God the Fall of Adam was subordinated to wider purposes of grace. In the mystery of God's purposes through the Fall superior blessings would flow to mankind by means of God's redeeming grace in Christ. The federal theologians and others debated the question of whether God's decree to redeem was logically prior to the decree to permit the fall (supralapsarianism), or whether the decree to permit the fall was logically prior to the decree to redeem (infralapsarianism). The matter is undoubtedly mysterious. But what is clear is that neither camp in this debate held that because creation comes before redemption in time this implies that redemption was subordinate to creation in the sense that it was second best, or a divine afterthought.

But even if our line of reasoning is incorrect there is still something a little disturbing about what Professor Torrance has to say. For he appears to imply that the created order was founded on nature, law and duty and that this is inherently inferior to one founded on grace. But it is necessary to remember two points. The first is that in this context 'nature' refers to what was originally created and pronounced 'good' by God, and that law is the righteous command of a wholly good God to unfallen creatures created in God's image. Secondly, there is a sense in which this whole original arrangement was gracious; it was the outcome of God's goodness; the creation did not deserve to be created. That it was created was due to the overflowing goodness of the all-sufficient God.

Furthermore, there is surely nothing inherently defective about a state of righteous obedience even though the Gospel of Christ, to our great surprise, reveals and provides greater blessings. Can one detect in these remarks of Professor Torrance an undervaluing of nature and reason more

characteristic of Karl Barth than of John Calvin? (For a useful recent critique of the Barthian approach to natural theology, in the broadest sense, see James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford, Clarendon Press,1993)).

(2) According to Professor Torrance, 'The federal scheme sees all under the sovereignty of God, but not under the mediatorial Headship of Christ as Man' (p.33). There is truth in this, but it is also somewhat misleading. It is true that the federal theologians see all under the sovereignty of God, even the Fall. But did not Calvin also? Is not Chapter XVIII of Book I of the *Institutes* devoted to maintaining that 'God So Uses the Works of the Ungodly, and So Bends Their Minds to Carry Out His Judgements, that He Remains Pure from Every Stain'? Is this not 'to see all under the sovereignty of God'?

Secondly, what does it mean for all to be under the Mediatorial Headship of Christ as Man? Christ can only be the Saviour of those who need salvation, the mediator of those who need mediation. Did Adam need salvation through Christ or mediation by Christ, before he fell? Clearly not, as both Calvin and the federal theologians teach. Does this mean that not all is under the Mediatorial headship of Christ? In a way it does. Adam before he fell did not need redemption and so was not in that sense under the mediatorship of Christ. But on the other hand Scripture teaches that Christ is the one redeemer and judge before whom every knee shall bow and every tongue confess. In this sense everything will be under the mediatorship of Christ, though not everyone will experience that mediatorship savingly, as Calvin emphatically teaches. In any case, how could events that occurred before the Incarnation be under the mediatorial headship of Christ *as Man*?

(3) According to Professor Torrance the federal scheme separates creation and redemption. As he says, Christ is portrayed in Scripture as both creator and redeemer. Nevertheless, despite this fact creation and redemption are distinct accomplishments; Christ's work as creator is distinct from his work as redeemer. It does not follow that because Christ is presented as both creator and redeemer that creation is redemption, any more than because God is presented as both Father and Son that the Father is the Son. Creation and redemption are not the same concept, nor does creation entail redemption. Rather, according to Calvin, Perkins and the federal theologians, redemption is only needed because creation is abused in the Fall.

(4) The federal scheme has substituted a legal understanding of man for a filial. But there is no suggestion in the covenant theologians mentioned by Professor Torrance that the Lord did not love the first pair, nor that the relation between the Lord and the couple was not a Father-children relationship. This issue partly depends, of course, on one's conception of fatherhood. A father may require things of his children even though he loves them; he may require things of them *because* he loves them. Further, insofar as Christ was the perfect law keeper, it could be argued that the relations between Christ as incarnate Son and the Father are every bit as much 'legal'. There is no absolute antithesis between law and love.

(5) Professor Torrance maintains that there is a shift in the doctrine of God from a prime emphasis on God as Triune to a Stoic concept of God as primarily the Lawgiver. (p.35) It must be agreed that there is not much in the book of Genesis about the tri-unity of God. But is there an emphasis in federal theology on God as primarily the Lawgiver? Here again, at the risk of appearing to be tedious, one needs to ask in what sense is God 'primarily' a Lawgiver? God revealed himself initially, as we have seen, as one who gave a command to the pair. Undoubtedly in this sense God is primarily the Lawgiver. But it would be unwise to draw from this the inference that God is not a God of love or grace, or that his love and grace are swamped by his justice.

Professor Torrance argues that the federal theologians teach that God is essentially just but only contingently loving, and that by contrast the true position is that 'God is Love - he is Father, Son and Holy Spirit in his innermost being - and what he is in his innermost being, he is in all his works and ways.'(p.35) But contrary to what Professor Torrance claims, John Owen and Jonathan Edwards (the two theologians whom he cites) do not teach that God is essentially just but only accidentally loving. They do not oppose love to justice in a way that is typically modern; rather they insist that the justice of God is equally exercised with respect to those who are saved and to those who are lost, but that the saved are saved because Christ has satisfied divine justice in place of those for whom he died. The love of God is not at the expense of his justice, but it is an expression of it.

(6) The federal theologians taught that Scripture is a book telling us our duty whereas Calvin sees it as the revelation of grace. But we have seen that in the case of William Perkins, whom Professor Torrance cites as a federal theologian, Scripture reveals the unconditional grace of God in Christ.

(7) According to federal theology God uses the covenant of law as the *paidagogos* to bring fallen sinners to Christ. (p.37) Here again some discrimination is called for. It was typical of covenant theologians (but not only of them) to preach the law to their hearers to convict them of sin before applying the healing balm of the gospel of God's grace in Christ. We have noted in the case of Perkins that what he refers to as the 'covenant of works' is a feature of each testament, and as such one of its purposes is to show to those who are willing to learn that salvation cannot be achieved by obedience to the law.

Was there, in the preaching of the law, a failure to see the significance of Calvin's distinction between 'legal repentance', where repentance is a condition of forgiveness, and 'evangelical repentance', where repentance is a response to grace and the word of the Cross? No, the federal theologians were well able to make the distinction between legal and evangelical repentance, and certainly did not regard repentance of either kind as a condition of forgiveness in the sense that implied that repentance was not the result of God's efficacious grace but was the unaided work of fallen man.

## III

The issues of whether federal theology was a degeneration from the original theology of Calvin, and was guilty of overlaying Calvin's emphasis on the grace of God in Christ with a layer of legalism are fascinating. But why are they important today? Let me make two suggestions. The first is to endorse Professor Torrance's remark that what is at stake in these debates 'is both the doctrine of God and our understanding of grace' (p.37) If this is so, the issues cannot be trivial, since God and grace go to the heart of one's understanding of the gospel. Where, so it seems to me, Professor Torrance errs is in driving a wedge between Calvin and later Calvinist theologians, whether they employed the terminology of the covenant of works to refer to the original arrangement, or whether, as in the case of Perkins, they did not. There are undoubtedly differences between them and among them, differences of style, emphasis, theological organisation, and terminology. But it is one thing to recognise development and change within a tradition, quite another thing to imply that the federal theology was a degenerate form of Calvin's theology, one that overturned his views of God and grace.

This brings us to the second reason why these issues are important. Theology and spirituality go hand in hand. While Protestants do not recognise tradition as a distinct source of theological authority nevertheless we cannot but recognise the power that tradition exercises in the church. Such power can often have a deadening and legalising effect, and that must be guarded against. But tradition, the doctrine and practice of our forefathers handed down to us, also provides the new generations of believers with their sense of identity. A loss of identity can be deeply unsettling. Sometimes upheaval is necessary, as with the Reformation itself, which greatly modified the doctrines and practices of the mediaeval church. But it is mischievous to unsettle the spirituality of people for less than the very strongest reasons. It does not appear that Professor Torrance has provided sufficient grounds for re-evaluating the tradition of Calvin and the federal theology in the way that he proposes.

# UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

**by George M. McEwen**

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The word 'authority' nowadays is largely an unacceptable one and to be under anyone's authority is thought to be rather an unpleasant position in which to find oneself. It is almost entirely alien to the modern mood. Indeed, the scientific theory of relativity has been illegitimately applied to the realm of 'truth and righteousness' and so we find to-day that everything is considered to be relative to everything else. We are told that there are no absolutes any longer, either in truth or in morality. There is said to be nothing which is binding upon our minds or upon our lives.

However, if you are the kind of Christian, which by the grace of God I am, who insists upon affirming the supreme authority of the Bible - or perhaps better, the supreme authority of God through the Bible - you will often find yourself 'swimming against the tide' of general religious thinking. Further, if we are truly Christian people, there is a fundamental conviction of ours that Jesus Christ is Lord and His lordship implies that He has authority over us and that we submit willingly and lovingly to Him in the exercise of that authority. Moreover, it is supremely by His Word that He directs, rules and reforms our lives individually and also corporately in the life of His Church.

In this address I want to argue that to submit to the authority of Scripture is both a *reasonable* and *purposeful* thing for us to do as professing Christians. There are, therefore, two main aspects of this subject entitled, 'Under the Authority of Scripture', which we want to consider together:- (1) The reasonableness of our being under the authority of Scripture. (2) The purpose for which we are under the authority of Scripture.

## THE REASONABLENESS OF BEING UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

After some thought, I believe that the best way to demonstrate this is to take the three words, 'revelation', 'inspiration' and 'authority' and define the meaning of each and then try to grasp how they relate to one another.

'Revelation' is an objective fact and refers to the self-disclosure of God. He has drawn aside the veil which shrouds Him from us and has, in fact, revealed Himself to us.

'Inspiration' refers to the process - the mode - which God has used by which to disclose Himself.

'Authority' is the result; namely, that which has been revealed by divine inspiration has an authority over us.

In bringing these three words together we can say that divine revelation by divine inspiration has divine authority. So, having seen in an introductory way the relation between these three words, let us now look at each one separately.

*Revelation*

This is the fundamental word. The English word is Latin in origin and basically means 'an unveiling'. So in a religious context, the word 'revelation' indicates that God has taken the initiative in His love and mercy to unveil Himself - to reveal Himself - to make Himself known to us.

Now the reasonableness of this idea of revelation should be evident to us because we would never be able to apprehend God otherwise. God Himself is not a suitable object of empirical investigation. The scientific method is unsuitable when you are talking about God, because it consists of the observation of certain data and the experimentation with that data which is presented to our five senses. The scientist works on what he can see, hear, touch, smell and taste. But our five senses, complex as they are, cannot grasp God. In Himself, God is invisible, intangible and not amenable to any of our senses. There is no physical data for us to work on. In addition, God is infinite in His being. He is altogether beyond the grasp of our little finite minds. We cannot discover Him. He eludes us. He is beyond us and if we imagine that we can 'box God up', we will be disappointed when we find the box is empty! It is not possible for us to grasp hold of God, for there is no means by which to do so!

Having said that, let us now turn to a very important passage of Scripture which deals with this whole subject of revelation. Isaiah 55:7f. You will notice that three times in verses 7 and 8 the couplets "thoughts" and "ways" are brought together. The wicked have to forsake their thoughts and ways because God says His thoughts and ways are above ours and as the heaven is higher than the earth, so His ways and His thoughts are higher than ours. So, according to verse 7, repentance consists in forsaking our thoughts and forsaking our ways. We, as sinners, are not able to understand by ourselves, either the gravity of our sin, or the possibility of God's forgiveness. We could never know 'the way of salvation' unless God were to reveal it to us. His thoughts are different from ours and His ways are different from ours and repentance begins with a forsaking of our ideas and our attitudes.

Not only are God's thoughts and ways different from our thoughts and ways, but they are much higher than them also - "as the heavens are higher than the earth" - and that is an infinite distance. It is a yawning chasm which separates the thoughts of God from the thoughts in the tiny minds of men. There is just no way in which the thoughts, ideas and attitudes in our little minds can attain to those lofty ones in the mind of God, for there is no ladder by which we can reach Him. We read of only one ladder between God and man in Scripture, that is the ladder in Jacob's dream and it was set up by God and not Jacob! So you can understand how our little ladders, by which we try to reach into the mind of God, simply don't begin to span the gulf!

So, divine revelation - or the idea that God should provide a bridge from His side, or a ladder from heaven which will reach down from Him to us - is a basically reasonable concept. We would never know what was in the mind of God without it.

Now as an aside at this point I want to say that it is important for us to distinguish between two different kinds of revelation. In this address we are thinking about Biblical revelation, but when we are thinking about the whole field of God revealing Himself, we must do what theologians - at least since the Reformation - have very clearly done and that is to distinguish between 'general revelation' and 'special revelation'. 'General revelation' is made to all mankind in nature (cf. Romans 1:19,20; Psalm 19:1-6), but 'special revelation' is given in Scripture. (cf. Psalm 19:7-11) Revelation in nature is revelation of His glory, but revelation in Scripture is especially a revelation of His grace. There is nothing about God's special love for sinners in nature. His plan of salvation cannot be read in the

heavens. If you want to find out about the grace of God in salvation, you have to read that in the book of Scripture, not in the book of nature.

So having noted that important distinction, let us return to Isaiah chapter 55 - this time to verses 10 and 11, "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth."(N.K.J.V.). The idea here is that as the rain and snow fall to earth from high up in heaven, so the word of God comes down from His mind and mouth high up in heaven to us who are on the earth. It is His word which is able to span the gulf between us and it is sent down to us by Him to accomplish His purpose and to prosper in the thing to which He sends it. So I hope it is clear to you what the sequence is - from the thoughts of God (vs.8&9), which are in His mind, we move to the words issuing from the mouth of God (vs.10&11).

Speech is the most sophisticated form of communication known to man. After all, it is by speech that we reveal ourselves to one another. If, at the beginning of this address, I had stood up before you and - as I am quite capable of doing! - been at a loss for words and if I had shown no facial expressions at all and stood here absolutely silent and straight-faced, none of you would have had any idea what actually was going on in my mind. No doubt you would all feel only pity and embarrassment for me, assuming that I was having a mental block of some sort! While I am silent before you, you cannot know what is in my mind, it is a secret to you. But as soon as I begin to speak to you, then you know and are hopefully able to follow what is in my mind, as I share with you the words which communicate my thoughts.

Now if that is true of communication between human beings who are finite, how much more true is it of God Who is infinite? If it is impossible for you to penetrate into my mind if I am silent before you, how much less possible it is to penetrate the Divine mind unless words issue forth from it. As we have seen in Isaiah 55, it is impossible for us to know what is in the mind of God unless He has spoken to us - and this is the important and best part - God has spoken! He has spoken His mind and He has revealed His mind to us in the words of Scripture.

So, never let us be ashamed of the Christian doctrine of revelation - special revelation' in the words of Scripture. This is a very reasonable and

logical Christian doctrine, because without it, what are the consequences? Without His gracious initiative through His word, God would remain for us hopelessly unknown for ever.

That is the first word in our consideration of the reasonableness of being under the authority of Scripture - 'Revelation'. That brings us now to consider secondly:-

*Inspiration*

'Revelation' is the broad term which covers the totality of God's self-disclosure, be that in Nature, in Scripture, or indeed, in Christ. But 'inspiration' is the word used to describe the process by which God has revealed Himself in Scripture.

Now we are not using this word 'inspiration' in the popular sense in which it is sometimes used to-day. You are speaking about artistic genius when you say, for example, that Shakespeare was inspired when he wrote his plays; or that Mozart was inspired when he produced his operas or symphonies; or that Wordsworth was inspired when he penned his thoughts in poetry.

This word 'inspiration' is used in the Bible in a very unique sense and the crucial verse in the New Testament referring to inspiration is found in II Timothy 3:16, where we are given the affirmation, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God". These last five words, "given by inspiration of God" are the translation of one Greek word meaning "God-breathed". So that in those words, "given by inspiration of God", we do not only mean that God breathed into the writers, enabling them to write certain things; nor do we mean that He breathed into the writings which already existed and in some way raising them to a new level of truth. No, strictly speaking what we mean by inspiration is that God breathed out what the human authors wrote. So in a way, the word 'inspiration' is a misleading one. It is really the 'expiration' of Scripture we mean, because it is breathed out of the mouth of God, rather than God breathing into the writers or the writings.

It is this fact, that the Scriptures are God-breathed, which enabled the Old Testament prophets to use the formula, "Thus says the Lord", or, "Hear the word of the Lord", or, "The word of the Lord came to me saying", or, "The mouth of the Lord has spoken". Further, it is this fact of the God-

breathed nature of Scripture which enabled the apostle Paul to claim that what he communicated was not the word of men, but the word of God (cf I Thessalonians 2:13). He was able to state in I Corinthians 2:13 that what he communicated was "not words taught by man's wisdom, but words taught by the Holy Spirit". So there we have the claim by the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostle, that their words are God's words, breathed out of His mouth.

Scripture then is 'revelation' - God speaking the words which are in His mind, but it is also 'inspiration' or 'expiration' - God breathing out His word and speaking His mind through human authors. Now when God breathed out His words, He didn't breathe them into space! He didn't shout audibly from the skies! He didn't produce documents and leave them lying around for people to discover, as Joseph Smith claims to have discovered the golden plates of the Book of Mormon. No. God spoke His words through human words - the words of the human authors of Scripture. So His words were arguably their words.

Moreover, in this process which we call 'inspiration' God did not ask the human authors to take down some dictation, as the Muslims believe Allah did to Mohammed - dictating every word of the Koran in Arabic! No, on the contrary, when God spoke - breathed out His word through human authors - the writers were using their faculties freely. They engaged in historical research. Luke, for example, tells us that is what he did. (cf Luke 1:1-4). The writers of Scripture expressed themselves in terms appropriate to the cultural background in which they lived. They developed their own syntax, vocabulary and literary style. They made their own theological emphasis appropriate to their character, background and temperament. They were not puppets, but were using their faculties freely so that God was speaking His words through their words.

This leads us to affirm, therefore, the double authorship of Scripture. Indeed, this is the Bible's own account of itself. In Hebrews 1:1 we read that God spoke through the prophets who were men, but in II Peter 1:21 we read that holy men spoke from God. Thus you can describe the doctrine of inspiration, either by saying that "God spoke through men", or by saying that "men spoke from God"; in other words that Scripture is both divine and human speech. Similarly, the Law in the Old Testament is called the "Law of Moses" and is equally called the "Law of the Lord". It is both human and divine and we must affirm both of these truths in such a way that neither contradicts the reality of the other.

Thus God spoke, but He did not speak in such a way that He violated the personality of the human authors, or we could put it another way and say that they used their faculties freely and yet they did not speak in such a way as to distort the divine message. So, their words were truly their words, but also, God's words and, as a result, what Scripture says, God says!

*Authority*

We want now to consider briefly this third word. Divine revelation by divine inspiration has divine authority. Authority is the result of revelation and inspiration. God-given revelation, in God-breathed words, carries with it God-sent authority. The divine authority which is inherent in Scripture is due to what Scripture is - a divine revelation given by divine inspiration. It is because it is a word from God that it has authority over men.

Let me put it like this. Behind any word there stands the person who speaks it and whether you receive the authority of the words of a particular person depends on the authority which you give to the speaker. If I have been speeding in my car and the police car appears with its siren sounding and flashing lights, it behoves me to slow down, pull over to the side of the road and stop my car. I wind down the window in order for the policeman to speak to me about what I have been doing and when he speaks, he does so with a certain firm authority!

Now, behind the words of God in Scripture there stands the person of God Himself. A good illustration of divine authority is given by Luke at the beginning of chapter 5 of his gospel. The Lord Jesus, after the disciples had toiled all night at their fishing and caught nothing, told Peter to launch out farther into the water and let down his net for a catch of fish. Peter blusteringly said - if I can paraphrase it this way, - "Well, you know Lord I think it would be foolish for me to try to catch some fish farther out in the water". "After all I know more about fishing than you do, as I've been at it all my life and my father and grandfather before me too". "You obviously know more about God and the things of God than I do, but when it comes to fishing I have the skills and experience of years of practice". "If that brother of mine had told me to do what you are saying I wouldn't have obeyed, but at YOUR word I will"! "I will do it because YOU tell me to do so"!

You see, behind such words as these stands a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is the authority of the Person that gives authority to His word.

At this point I want to sum up the first part of this address by emphasising that our claim for the reasonableness for accepting Biblical authority is that God revealed Himself by speaking and we couldn't possibly know Him otherwise. This 'inspired' speech - this 'God-breathed' speech - has been written down and preserved in what we call Scripture. We need to understand and stress to-day that Scripture is precisely God's word written through human authors and that consequently it has supreme authority over the individual, the church and the nation. I do trust that all of us will have an increasing confidence in the reasonableness of this doctrine of the authority of Scripture, because that authority derives from a proper understanding, first of all, of revelation and inspiration.

Having deliberately spent the larger proportion of this address on the first part, let us now consider secondly:-

## THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH WE ARE UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

In order to discover what this purpose is we turn to II Timothy 3:14-17. In verse 16 we read that all Scripture is profitable and it is so because it is God-breathed. How does it profit us? In these verses we have the answer in two main ways:- (i) it instructs us for salvation; (ii) it equips us for service.

*(i) It instructs us for salvation - v.15,*

"...the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (N.K.J.V.). John R.W. Stott helpfully comments on the first part of this verse,

> The Bible is essentially a handbook of salvation. Its over-arching purpose is to teach not facts of science (e.g. the nature of moon rock) which men can discover by their own empirical investigation, but facts of salvation, which no space exploration can discover but only God can reveal.[1]

The Bible, therefore, is not a text-book of science. It is a text-book of salvation. Not that it is contradictory to science, but rather that God's purpose has been revealed in and through Scripture. Not what scientists can discover by themselves empirically, but what no human being could possibly discover by himself unless God revealed it. That is the purpose of Scripture. It is to reveal what cannot be discovered by human research alone. So, the Scriptures focus on salvation and not on science.

The word 'salvation' has many facets to it. It includes the totality of God's purpose for us, not only in the forgiveness of our sins and our reconciliation to God, but also our growth in Christ-likeness of character and conduct until the day when we are given new bodies and translated into a new world where God's salvation and purpose for us has been completed.

John Stott comments further on the latter part of verse 15,

> More particularly, the Bible instructs for salvation 'through faith in Christ Jesus'. So, since the Bible is a book of salvation, and since salvation is through Christ, the Bible focuses its attention upon Christ.[2]

We need to remember, therefore, that wherever we turn in the Scriptures, we are to look for Christ. The Old Testament foretells and foreshadows Him. The Gospels give an account of His birth, life, words, works, death and resurrection and the purpose of these. The book of Acts tells us what he continues to do as the ascended Lord through His chosen apostles. The Epistles unfold the fulness of His saving work and divine glory. The book of Revelation shows the great consummation of all things in and through Him.

The Scriptures, therefore, continually bear witness to Christ. So let me encourage you, not simply to look for references to Christ in the Bible, but when you find reference to Him there, search for Him diligently - go to Him as the living and loving Saviour! Put your trust in Him! Flee to Him as the object and desire of all that you long for!

*(ii) It equips us for service - V.16*

"All Scripture .... is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction for instruction in righteousness: ...". Scripture, therefore, is profitable for

teaching the truth and correcting error and it is profitable also for the rebuking of evil and training in righteousness. In other words, Scripture not only leads to salvation, but it shows us the truth of God and the righteousness of God and by opening this up to us, it then equips us "for every good work".

Notice, it equips "the man of God" - a phrase used in the Old Testament of Moses, Elijah, Daniel and other leaders. It also refers, of course, to Christian leaders and they cannot grow to maturity without the Scriptures leading them, before they can attempt to lead others. But it is applicable, too, to all Christians whatever their position of responsibility in life. No Christian who neglects the Scriptures will grow into maturity and be properly equipped "for every good work" which God requires him or her to do.

It is very important for us to constantly remember that the God-revealed, God-breathed Scripture has divine authority over us and is profitable for us in those two ways. That being so, let us resolve by God's grace to do three things:-

*(1) Let us 'continue' in God's Word ourselves.*

We shouldn't overlook that word 'continue' in v.14. "But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them." Timothy had been taught by three generations - his grandmother, his mother and Paul the apostle, so he was encouraged to continue the process. Sometimes the young Christian is tempted to give up his confidence in the Word of God. Sometimes also, theological students can be so taken up with their studies in a wrong manner that the Bible becomes stale and dull when they treat it like a scientific text-book. I exhort you to continue, by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, in your study and application of the Word of God to your own life, knowing from whom you have already learned it!

So, never mind what other people say. Never mind if the world laughs at you. Never mind if your friends pour scorn on you and turn away from you. Remember that this Word is like no other for it reveals to us the very thoughts and ways of God. Continue to be faithful in the Word. You have been taught by your fathers and mothers in the faith, therefore,let the Bible be in your hands and constantly in your hearts, pointing you to the Saviour!

*(2) Let us teach the Word of God to the children.*

Timothy was very privileged. Paul reminds him that from his childhood he had been taught the Scriptures. The generations before him had made sure that he was exposed to the Scriptures from his earliest days. Christian parents have the primary responsibility for the religious education of their children. So, let us be among those who recover in our land to-day the lost practice of consistent 'family worship'.

*(3) Let us preach the Word of God to the world.*

"Preach the word!" (II Tim. 4:2). This God-breathed Scripture which Paul had been referring to - preach it - make it known - lift up your voice and let the world around you hear the Word of God!

This, then, is God's purpose when we are under the authority of His Word. The Bible in our hands and in our hearts. The Bible in our homes and in our family life. The Bible in the world to make known to everyone and to every nation the good news of salvation from sin in the Lord Jesus Christ!

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# THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY
# A Ministry of the Word

**by Robert L. W. McCollum**

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The title of this article may be considered a truism, a self evident or indisputable truth. Thankfully in many circles the Christian ministry is essentially a ministry of the Word, but sadly in some churches the connection between the Christian ministry and the ministry of the Word is not as intimately connected as it ought to be. The critic might respond with the comment that all ministers still preach sermons to their congregations. While such a feature is undoubtedly true the point at issue is not whether ministers preach sermons but whether their messages are worthy of the term preaching. This point is made by J. I. Packer in the introduction to a book on preaching:

> Not every discourse that fills the appointed 20 or 30 minute slot in public worship is actually preaching .... Sermons are often composed and delivered on wrong principles. Thus, if they fail to open Scripture or they expound it without applying it, or if they are no more than lectures aimed at informing the mind, or addresses seeking only to focus the present self awareness of the listening group, or if they are delivered as statements of the preacher's opinion rather than as messages from God, or if their lines of thought do not require listeners to change in any way, they fall short of being preaching, just as they would if they were so random and confused that no-one could tell what the speaker was saying.[1]

Based on this assessment of what sermons ought to be those called to the Christian ministry must ask the question, "Are we consistently ministers of the Word?" In response to such a question many will honestly admit that preaching is given a low priority in their list of weekly engagements. Klaas Runia illustrates this fact from an American study.

> On the basis of an extensive study of the lives of 1,600 clergymen of twenty Protestant denominations all throughout the U.S.A. Samuel Bizzard concluded, even in 1955, that the traditional role of preacher in Protestantism is of "declining importance. It is being

> relegated to a less important position, and the roles of pastor, counsellor, organiser, administrator and promoter are consuming the major portion of the minister's time".[2]

As we evaluate the scene in the British Isles forty years later we are led to the conclusion that the American trend of the fifties has rapidly become the British pattern of the nineties. In so many meetings less and less time is allocated to preaching. Often competing with the sermon are gospel groups, soloists, drama, testimony sharing, chorus singing and musical recitals. Although there are many reasons for the decline in preaching the most basic reason is a loss of confidence in preaching as a form of communication. Communication experts give preaching a low communication value in comparison with dialogue or discussion or the impact of audio-visual presented through the medium of video or television. H. D. Bastian says in his book "Verkundigung und Verfremdung" (Proclamation and Alienation) that preaching, because it is non-cooperative communication, is no longer suitable for our time. It is like using a kerosene lamp in the age of electric light.[3] A conference of theologians meeting in the U.S.A. in the 1960's concluded that the sermon is "one of the least satisfying methods for extending religious messages to outsiders."[4]

Living in this kind of communication climate and confronted with a general depreciation of preaching in the culture many ministers react by relegating less and less time to pulpit preparation. In such cases the roles of pastor, counsellor, organiser and administrator are consuming the major portion of the minister's time. As we live and work through the last decade of a very reactionary century how are ministers to evaluate their Call to the ministry? Should we still be identifying "a Call to the ministry" with the ministry of the Word? It is the aim of this article to demonstrate that this is still a valid identification, that the Call to the ministry is essentially a call to the ministry of the Word.

## THE BIBLICAL MANDATE FOR PREACHING

Haddon W Robinson states, "No-one who takes the Bible seriously dare count preaching out".[5] The Divine commission of the Old Testament prophets is couched in language which reveals that the 'Call to office' is a 'Call to proclaim the Divine message'. When commissioning Isaiah, God said "Go and tell this people" (Isa. 6:9). The terms of Jeremiah's commission are similar. "Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and

said to me 'Now I have put my words in your mouth .... Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you'" (Jer. 1:9, 17). When God commissioned Ezekiel he said "Son of man; listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you. Go now to your countrymen in exile and speak to them" (Ezek. 3:10).

A study of the New Testament reveals the central place of preaching prior, during and subsequent to Christ's mission. John the Baptist engaged in a preaching ministry as he prepared the way for the Messiah (Matt. 3:1). The ministry of Jesus is also primarily a preaching ministry. His ministry is introduced in such terms by Matthew "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near'" (Matt. 4:17).

The fact that the preaching of Christ was accompanied by mighty signs and wonders does not undermine the priority of preaching. The primary function of these miracles was to authenticate the messenger, to attest the fact that Jesus had come from God. When Jesus appointed the Twelve it was for the purpose "that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach" (Mk. 2:14). Later references record them engaging in this activity. e.g. Mark 6:12 "They went out and preached that people should repent". On the Day of Pentecost following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the Christian Church became a preaching Church (Acts 2:14).

## THE APOSTOLIC PRIORITY IN PREACHING

The New Testament demonstrates not only that the apostles continued to communicate the Gospel by preaching but also that they considered this their primary function. When administrative pressures threatened to distract them from their Calling we read in Acts chapter 6 that appropriate action was taken. Men were appointed to relieve the apostles of diaconal duties, because, as they put it, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables" (Acts 6:2).

When the ministry of the apostle Paul is examined the same priority emerges. When imprisoned, Paul communicates the truth in the form of letters. Even though these letters comprise a major part of the New Testament, Paul when writing them, did not view them as a substitute for preaching. In his letter to the Romans Paul wrote, "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong - that is, that you

and I might be mutually encouraged by each other's faith .... That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome" (Rom. 1:11, 12, 15). As Hadden W Robinson remarks, "A power comes through the word preached that even the inerrant written word cannot replace."[6]

## THE DIVINE PURPOSE OF PREACHING

The Scriptures reveal that it is primarily through the preaching of the gospel that God chooses to regenerate His people. Peter, for example, reminded his readers that they had, "been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23). That word, Peter went on to explain, "is the word that was preached to you" (1 Pet. 1:25). It was through the preaching of the Word that God had accomplished his saving purpose in the lives of those people. cf. 1 Thess. 1:5,9, 2:13.

The apostle Paul reveals the place and priority of preaching in the salvation of souls in his first letter to the believers in Corinth. In the section of this letter where he contrasts the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of God he declares:

> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom did not know God, it pleased God by the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (1 Cor. 1:21 N.K.J.V.)

Even though preaching may not have harmonized with the prevailing cultural mores Paul continued to have unshakeable confidence in the method God had chosen to accomplish his saving work.

> Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 1:22-24)

Wherever the New Testament believers went with the gospel of Christ, whether it was to the academically arrogant members of the Areopagus or to the politically proud citizens of Rome or to the seedy sordid population of Corinth, they unashamedly preached the gospel because in Paul's words "it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes"

(Rom. 1:16). The indispensable place of preaching in the sovereign purpose of God is further illustrated in that classic piece of reasoning in Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 10. Quoting from the Old Testament prophet Joel the apostle declares "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." (v.13) But this calling upon the name of the Lord presupposes the preaching of this Name - a point Paul proceeds to make:

> How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news"! (Rom. 10:14, 15)

## THE AUTHORITY OF THE PREACHED WORD

*a) The testimony of Scripture*

The Old Testament prophets were identified as those who proclaimed a message from God. With the authority vested in them by the Almighty they prefaced their sermons with such phrases as "Hear the word of the Lord" (Isa. 1:10) or "This is what the Lord says:" (Jer. 31:2)

A look at the New Testament preachers will reveal the same identification between the preached word and the Word of God. This is supremely illustrated as Paul recalls the spiritual history of the Thessalonians in his first letter to them. It had been through the preaching of Paul's missionary band that the Thessalonians had come to faith "turning to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). Later in his letter he writes, "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Thess. 2:13).

Many accept that apostolic preaching was the Word of God but question whether that can be true, in any sense, of preaching today. In one sense preaching can never be equated with that of the apostles: they were instruments of special revelation. Many of their writings are included in the completed revelation of God. In another sense, though, their preaching is similar to Biblical preaching today. Paul never differentiates between his

own preaching and that of his fellow workers. When writing to the Thessalonians he did not distinguish between his preaching to them and their preaching in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess. 1:5, 8). Neither does he distinguish between his preaching and that of his fellow workers. " ... the word of God which you heard from us" (1 Thess. 2:13). When Paul writes to churches about Timothy or when he writes to Timothy himself he uses the same terms which he used for his own preaching.[7] The apostle Peter when referring to the use of gifts within the church writes, "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God" (1 Pet. 3:11a). On this verse Calvin comments:

> He who speaks, that is, he who is rightly appointed by public authority, let him speak as it were oracles of God; that is, let him reverently in the fear of God and in sincerity seek to perform the charge committed to him, regarding himself as engaged in God's work and as ministering God's Word and not his own.[8]

Such references as these lead to the conclusion that when the Word of God is faithfully preached Christ is speaking through the words of the preacher.

*b) The testimony of the Reformers*

The understanding of preaching cited above is something which the Reformers affirmed. Martin Luther regarded the preacher as the "mouthpiece of God." It was Luther's conviction that:

> God, the creator of heaven and earth, speaks with you through his preachers ... These are the words of God, not of Plato or Aristotle. It is God Himself who speaks.[9]

John Calvin, as we have already observed, held an equally high view of preaching.

> Those who think the authority of the Word is dragged down by the baseness of the men called to teach it disclose their own ungratefulness. For, among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned the human race, it is a singular privilege that he designs to consecrate to Himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that His voice may resound in them.[10]

In Calvin's Homilies on 1 Samuel (No 42) the prophets and pastors are said to be "the very mouth of God".[11]

Heinrich Bullinger summed up the view of preaching held by the Reformers in a statement contained in the Second Helvetic Confession of which he was the author.

> The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God. Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed and received by the faithful.[12]

The attitude of the Puritans in the seventeenth century is revealed in a sermon by David Clarkson, entitled, "Public Worship to be Preferred before Private".

> Here the dead hear the voice of the Son of God and those that hear do live ... Here he cures diseased souls with a word ... Here he dispossesses Satan ... Wonders these are, and would be so counted were they not the common work of the public ministry.[13]

Charles Simeon in the eighteenth century expounding the text containing our Lord's command "Take heed therefore how ye hear" (Lk. 8:18) declared:

> Ministers are ambassadors for God, and speak in Christ's stead. If they preach what is founded on the Scriptures, their word, as far as it is agreeable to the mind of God, is to be considered as God's. This is asserted by our Lord and his apostles. We ought, therefore, to receive the preacher's word as the word of God Himself. With what humility, then ought we to attend to it! What judgement may we not expect, if we slight it![14]

On the basis of Scripture and on the assessment of the Reformers and their successors, those called to preach God's Word possess an authority in the pulpit which is not their own. It is an authority which arises out of the message which they preach. That authority of course will only be present if in fact the preacher is faithfully expounding and applying the text of Scripture.

## PREACHING IN AN ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN CULTURE

At a time in the history of the church when the prevailing Western culture is characterised by a self-conscious revolt against authority those called to minister the Word of God must never become apologetic over the message they have been appointed to declare. Charlie Watts of the Rolling Stones may have been reflecting the attitude of many when he declared:

> I'm against any form of organised thought. I'm against ... organised religion like the church. I don't see how you can organise ten million minds to believe one thing.[15]

Irrespective of such hostility to an authoritative declaration of God's Word preachers today must not lose sight of their high calling. George Whitefield entered upon the ministry of the Word in the eighteenth century when the life of the church was at a low ebb. From the outset, however, he had complete confidence in the authority of his message. He was determined that it should receive the respect it deserved as God's Word. One of his biographers, John Pollock, illustrates this by recalling Whitefield's reaction in a New Jersey meeting house when he noticed an old man settling down for his accustomed, sermon-time nap. Whitefield began his sermon quietly, without disturbing the gentleman's slumbers. But then in measured, deliberate words he said:

> If I had come to speak to you in my own name, you might rest your elbows upon your knees and your heads on your hands, and go to sleep! ... But I have come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, and (he clapped his hands and stamped his foot) I must and I will be heard. The old man woke up startled.[16]

It is in the name of the Lord of hosts that the Christian minister still speaks to men. As he preaches faithfully the Word of God, he must do so with the authority inherent in the Word. Whether his hearers are rebellious or apathetic they ought to have some awareness that, through the sermon. Christ is addressing their souls. In Robinson's words:

> Through the preaching of the Scriptures, God encounters men and women to bring them to salvation (2 Tim. 3:15) and to richness and ripeness of Christian character (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Something awesome happens when God confronts an individual through preaching and seizes him by the soul.[17]

## THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY - A GLORIOUS CALLING

The Christian ministry - a ministry of the Word. And there is no more glorious or exalted calling in all the world. Charles Simeon wrote to John Venn on the occasion of his ordination in 1782:

> My dearest friend, I most sincerely congratulate you ... on your accession to the most valuable, most honourable, most important and most glorious office in the world - to that of an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ.[18]

The manner in which the Scriptures depict the ministry of the Word must deeply humble all those whom God has called to this high office. It ought also instil within every minister the realization that preaching is a very solemn and momentous enterprise. Whatever else may be neglected sermons must not be. Whatever the prevailing pressures, the minister who knows his priorities will plan his week round the allotted time for sermon preparation. He will take care not to skimp his preparation. J. I. Packer, reflecting on the hours the Puritans devoted to sermon preparation, comments:

> To prepare good sermons may take a long time - but who are we, whom God has set apart for the ministry, to begrudge time for this purpose? We shall never perform a more important task than preaching.

And then Packer concludes with the piercing challenge:

> If we are not willing to give time to sermon preparation, we are not fit to preach and have no business in the ministry at all.[19]

This emphasis on preaching does not in any way minimise the importance of the pastoral care to be exercised by the pastor as he visits among his people. Without that personal knowledge of their lives there cannot be the personal and practical application which is essential to all true preaching. The emphasis on the ministry of the Word must never be relaxed, however, on account of personal visiting. A good stewardship of time will help the servant of Christ in the ministry to achieve the appropriate balance. One servant of Christ who was singularly used of God as a blessing to the Christian Church in the seventeenth century and who through his writings has been a blessing ever since is John Owen. His views on the subject of preaching are worthy of note:

> The first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the Word. It is a promise relating to the New Testament, that God "would give unto his church pastors according to his own heart, which should feed them with knowledge and understanding" (Jer. 3:15). This is by preaching or teaching the Word, and not otherwise. This feeding is of the essence of the office of a pastor .... The care of preaching the gospel was committed to Peter, and in him to all true pastors of the church under the name of "feeding" (Jn. 21:15,16). According to the example of the apostles they are to free themselves from all encumbrances, that they may give themselves wholly unto the word and prayer (Acts 6). Their work is to "labour in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17), and thereby to feed the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers (Acts 20). ... This work and duty, therefore, as was said, is essential unto the office of a pastor .... Nor is it required only that he preach now and then at his leisure; but that he lay aside all other employments, though lawful, all other duties in the church, as unto such a constant attendance on them as would divert him from his work, that he give himself unto it .... Without this, no man will be able to give a comfortable account of his pastoral office at the last day.[20]

Those called to this glorious calling in the Christian church ought to keep before them Paul's words to Timothy:

> Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. (2 Tim. 2:15)

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# BOOK REVIEWS

*God Strengthens: Ezekiel simply explained*, Derek Thomas, Evangelical Press, 1993. Pb. 320pp. £8.95.

Preaching from the Old Testament is an important exercise for all who are involved in the ministry of the Word of God. We all believe in the truth and teaching of the Old Testament, yet how long is it since we have preached a sermon or a series of sermons on the Prophecy of Ezekiel? We are committed to declare the whole counsel of God and that means much more than preaching from the Gospels and the Epistles with the occasional use of a familiar Old Testament text.

Derek Thomas has put us incalculably in his debt when he followed his excellent commentary on Isaiah, "God Delivers", with his equally excellent exposition of Ezekiel, "God Strenghens".

The first thing that strikes us as we handle the book is the succint sub - title, "Ezekiel simply explained". We may well ask, Is it possible to give a simple explanation of what on first reading seems to be a most obscure and intricate book? Has the author adopted a simple or simplistic approach to a difficult task? As we make a careful study of the volume, these questions are well answered. Derek Thomas has given us, after years of painstaking study, a remarkably simple exposition. His approach is not simplistic but a thorough, well developed and well presented assessment of the teaching of this major, if neglected prophet. In a brief introduction we are brought face to face with Ezekiel and his message. The prophet's name was a constant reminder of God's power and brought comfort to those who were able to understand the meaning of the name - "God Strengthens". As a young man Ezekiel saw the decline of Assyria and the rise of Babylon. Judah's leaders were taken captive and after six years a second deportation took place that included the young priest, Ezekiel.

For twenty - seven years he faithfully witnessed as a prophet, and in spite of the sad death of his beloved wife (24; 15 - 27), he continued his work without complaint. He sets an example to all ministers and Christian workers by his faithfulness and total commitment to the cause of God. His commissioning and message are dealt with concisely and effectively in chapters 1 to 5.

Ezekiel had a very difficult task to perform. In chapters 6 to 24 he declares the righteous judgment of God upon a guilty nation. In page after page we are reminded of the severity of divine justice and His punishment of sin, a doctrine that is too little accepted and too rarely emphasised today. These are devastating chapters in which various symbols are used to illustrate the wrath of God. We see here the imaginative and visionary mind of the prophet as he pictures the ruin of a nation in terms that the people would understand. Neighbouring nations are not spared and their corrupting influences are sharply condemned. Egypt in particular receives just judgments,(chapters 25 - 32), this followed by the fall of Jerusalem and the consequent tribulation that the Lord's people would suffer (33 - 39). But though God is a righteous God, He is also faithful to His covenant promises. The note of restoration and blessing is sounded (40 - 48), and the gospel of grace is fervently preached. In following this outline the author gives fair and adequate attention to each section of the prophecy.

Two distinctive features give outstanding help to readers. The first is entitled 'Focus'. On four occasions this helpful interlude is used. On pages 66 and 67 our attention is turned to Deuteronomy in which the blessings of obedience are listed and the severe penalties for covenant violation are set out. These penalties, foretold by Moses, had their exact fulfilment in Ezekiel's day.

The second focus, (pp.121 - 123), deals with the nature of God's covenant. It is a gracious unilateral promise from God that calls for submission and obedience from man. Thomas grasps the nettle and relates this covenant to the election of Israel. He accepts Calvin's theory of a double election - general and open in the choice of all Abraham's seed, and special and secret for all who would by God's grace receive new hearts. His criticism and rejection of the views of other commentators is always done in a kindly manner.

In the third focus, (pp 228 - 239) entitled "The Land of Promise", some fundamental errors relating Old Testament Prophecy to Israel are exposed. He contends that God's purpose for Israel and His purpose for His Church are similar and quotes Paul's references in Galatians to believers as 'the Israel of God', and 'the children of Abraham'. He condemns Scofield's millenarian views as applied to Ezekiel 40 to 48, and shows that these chapters do not predict a return of the Jews to their land in a so-called millenium. He prefers to see these promises as 'glimpses of heaven'.

In his final focus on chapters 40 to 48 (pp263 - 265) he ignores fanciful interpretations and follows the argument of E. J. Young that "the vision of the Church of God upon earth is symbolised by the detailed description of the Temple".

The second distinctive and helpful feature is the concise summary at the end of each chapter. This clarifies the issues raised and gives a positive and practical application to the message. The note of encouragement is clearly sounded and the glorious hope of heaven is the ultimate fulfilment of the prophet's vision.

The commentary achieves its aim , It makes a difficult book intelligible and gives a full and clear exposition that is easily understood by students of the Word.

We have evidence throughout that Mr. Thomas is first and foremost a gifted preacher and his homiletical format will stimulate all who would preach the Gospel from Ezekiel.

The quality of the work and the amount of diligent research that lies behind the commentary is illustrated by the fact that there are 22 pages of references. Three maps and four diagrams add to the value of the book.

The reviewer, in recommending the book most warmly, would also pray that many would buy, read, mark and inwardly digest these majestic truths and would, like the author and his children, grow to love Ezekiel too.

**Adam Loughridge**

*The Bolsec Controversy on Predestination: From 1551 to 1555*, Philip C. Holtrop, Edwin Mellen Press, 1993. Book 1, 409pp. £59.65. Book 2, 1033pp. £69.95.

In 1551 Jerome Bolsec, an ex-Carmelite monk and a physician of sorts, caused a stir in Geneva when he challenged the doctrine of predestination as taught by Calvin. The ensuing controversy and trial were protracted and bitter. Probably the most dramatic occasion was when Bolsec, in the presence of the Congregation of pastors, attacked Calvin's doctrine, accusing

him of heresy and arguing that Augustine had not maintained his doctrine of election. Calvin was not present when the meeting commenced, but entered unnoticed and stood listening. When Bolsec had finished Calvin stepped forward and in a reply lasting an hour gave a brilliant and devastating refutation of Bolsec's arguments. In due course Bolsec was arrested, put on trial and although the death penalty was available for blasphemy and heresy, owing to pressure from Berne where he was a citizen, he was simply banished from Geneva. Such was the prevailing spirit of the sixteenth century. Bolsec finally returned to the Roman fold.

Professor Holtrop of Calvin College has done massive and valuable research into the Bolsec affair. While recognising the ability of Calvin, he clearly has considerable sympathy for Bolsec's position that election and rejection take place in history, theology being relational rather than sequential. Thus the concept of a divine decree in eternity which is worked out in time and history is rejected in favour of an interaction of God's election and man's faith *in history*. (Bk.1 p.91). Holtrop states Bolsec's position succinctly: "In Bolsec's view man comes to faith only by means of special grace and the extraordinary call and drawing of God. From this undeserved blessing we get communion of the faithful with Christ, a love for God, and election to eternal life. Therefore election does not precede faith, but is the consequence. More accurately, we should see these together. Therefore believers can be called 'elect' and 'beloved' - since they are loved by God for Christ's sake. But vis-a-vis this special or efficacious grace, human beings have freedom not to believe, and thus to render God's grace non-efficacious, since they do not 'take it and esteem it as they should.' The conclusion: Their failure to believe comes from their own contempt and rebellion, and not from God's decree." (BK. 1 p.74). So the sequential is rejected in favour of the "integrated," or "dynamic" concept (Bk. 1. p62; p.135 n.197), and human autonomy remains intact.

The problem here has several dimensions. Did the Reformers (and their successors) really think that eternity preceded history, or did they see history encircled, even intersected, by eternity? Can we think (let alone preach) clearly unless we do so sequentially? Does not Scripture consistently present God's saving grace sequentially - e.g., Romans 8:29, 30? There is the constant temptation to approach theology from the standpoint of philosophy, something the Reformers never did. Philosophy is a good servant but a bad master.

Professor Holtrop, however, has rendered a valuable service in deliberately placing the Bolsec affair in its "historical matrix." He rightly shows that the Genevan Reformers saw the Bolsec controversy as a threat to peace. The fear of insurrection was real, for Bolsec had the support of the libertines and, as Holtrop says. "the prospect of overthrowing Calvin was still relatively strong."

Holtrop paints Calvin "warts and all" and holds, as it were, a magnifying glass over the warts! He rightly affirms that what is needed "is not the hagiography of Calvin's admirers since Beza's *Life of Calvin*, nor the demonology of his despisers since Bolsec's *Life of Calvin*. We need honest scholarship that is not defensive. We have to see Calvin and Beza as living persons, with virtues and vices - and not as static figures on the Reformation Wall." Agreed. Yet in this endeavour we must ever seek to be fair. Calvin could be intolerant, abusive, irritable, frustrated and depressed - little wonder when we consider his chronic ill- health, his heavy work-load and his many enemies. Jean-Daniel Benoit strikes the right balance: "Admittedly Calvin did sometimes harden to the extent of becoming touchy and violent, even fanatical, on questions of doctrine; for he was convinced that he had the truth of God, and never tolerated any contradiction. He was proud, and that must be admitted, but with the pride of a man who has confidence in his own integrity and the good sense of his exegesis, its surface never disturbed by any doubt; and a pride at least made up of absolute conviction and grim sincerity. But apart from the cases in which doctrine appeared to him to be threatened, Calvin was humble and never hesitated to confess his faults." Benoit then quotes from his letter to the Genevan church after his banishment: "I have no doubt that God has brought us down as He has in order to make us acknowledge our ignorance, our indiscretion and the other weaknesses which I for my part have often felt to be in me, and which I make no difficulty in confessing before the Lord's church" (*Calvin in his Letters*, p. 256f).

Holtrop's work is provocative in the best sense, a mine of information and deserving a place in every seminary and college library. We await the completion of his study with interest.

**Frederick S. Leahy**

*Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation*, edited by Mark A. Noll, Apollos, 1991. Pb. 232pp. £11.99.

The editor of this book, Mark A Noll, has chosen ten important confessions from the Reformation period which he believes are 'some of the most revealing literary products of a turning point in the history of Christianity'.

He has included three confessions which are Lutheran, three which are Reformed or Calvinistic, one which is Anabaptist, one which is the doctrinal standard of the Reformation in England and two which are Roman Catholic.

In most cases the whole text is included, but where where this would be impracticable as for example in the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, selected portions of the text are used.

The editor has consciously limited his selection of material to the first two generations of the Reformation which explains the absence of later significant documents such as the Belgic Confesion and the Westminister Standards.

In the useful introduction Mark Noll sets the historical context of these Confessions. He affirms that conditions in the Sixteenth century were ripe for the composition of Confessions, both official and personal. They arose for a variety of reasons but one of the chief surely was the demand from entire 'communities or from leaders within those communities for uncomplicated yet authoritative statements of the faith'. On all sides spokesmen recognized the need for brief theological summaries that all could undertand.

The Confessions performed a multitude of functions and among these the editor suggests that they 'raised banners around which local communities could rally and which could mark boundaries from opponents'. They also established a norm to discipline the erring.

Noll answers well the variety of objections to the existence and use of Creeds and Confessions. These objections come either from those whose rallying cry is 'No creed but the Bible' or from those who regard Confessional

statements as infringements of intellectual integrity or personal religious rights.

He makes three points in response to these objections. First is the historical observation that all Protestant bodies have operated under the authority of either formal written Confessions or informal unwritten standards. Second is the practical consideration that written Confessional documents do in fact encourage clarity of belief and openness in theological discussion. Third is the fact that making Confessional statements is in itself a biblical practice and in support he quotes such texts as Titus 1 verse 9 'the sure word' and 1 Timothy 3 verse 16, that which we 'confess'.

This book is primarily of value to the person who has an interest in the study of the Reformation period. By setting the various documents along side each other it enables us to identify better the nature of the struggle which was going on at this momentous period in the history of Christ's Church.

The book however has a value to a more general readership. It enables us to appreciate the continuing need for confessional statements and standards within the Church in every generation. In a day of doctrinal ignorance and confusion even by professing members of Christian congregations, there is much benefit to be gained from a study of those clear Confessional statements which are part of our heritage. And in a day when Christianity is so loosely defined the adherence to a particular Confession is both a safeguard for the Church and a basis for true fellowship between Churches.

One weakness in this work is the lack of critical assessment of the individual Confessions. Perhaps however that was not the editor's intention nor would it have been possible given the restraints of length. If the study of these various documents stimulates the reader to make his own assessment of their content it will have served a good purpose.

One amusing illustration of the way in which the world of the twentieth century differs from that of the sixteenth comes in the editor's concern to explain the Reformer's use of 'masculine' language. 'Readers committed to modern gender conventions will immediately recognize and hopefully understand the linguistic conventions of the sixteenth century that allowed for the use of 'man', 'men' and 'his' to speak for all human beings' ! A

minor irritant in what is a useful and stimulating book.

**C.K. Hyndman**

*He Spoke in Parables*, Gordon J Keddie, Evangelical Press, 1994. Pb. 271 pp. £6.95.

The history of the interpretation of the parables provides abundant examples of fanciful and wrong-headed exegesis which has succeeded only in burying the Word of God under an avalanche of human speculation. The medieval theologian's penchant for finding significance in every detail of a parable is still alive among some evangelical expositors. It is amazing what some people can get out of a parable. What most Bible-readers need, however, are level-headed guides who enable them to see what each parable in its context is actually saying and who provide guidance for relevant application. Gordon Keddie is such a guide.

Keddie's aim is to provide an exposition of most of Jesus' parables and parabolic sayings structured around the theme of the Kingdom of God. Thus he begins with "The nature of God's Kingdom", considering the purpose of the parables, along with the message, growth, value and ministry of the Kingdom and the two seeds in the Kingdom. This section lays down the fundamental principles for parable interpretation which avoid allegorizing and speculation, and allow Scripture to be its own interpreter.

Keddie is right to set the parables in the context of Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom which already is present but not yet in its final manifestation. Expositors have often gone astray by not having a clear view of the nature of the Kingdom, with the result that they see in the parables general truths which, while perfectly scriptural, do not actually fit the content of Jesus' Kingdom preaching.

A further strength of Keddie's exposition is that he considers all the parables in relation to the Kingdom of God. Even though only some of the parables mention the Kingdom explicitly, this is surely correct and helpful. Jesus' parabolic teaching is thus seen as a whole, and the second section of the book, "The marks of Kingdom life", clearly grows out of what has been set down previously. Here such themes as forgiveness, prayerfulness, humility and seeking the lost are examined as many of the most familiar

parables are expounded.

The final section, not surprisingly, is "The consummation of the Kingdom", and here the realities of the return of Christ and the final judgement are considered from parables such as those of the talents and the ten virgins. The eternal consequences of rejecting Christ are set before the reader with grace and clarity, but also with faithfulness to biblical truth. No room is left for neo-evangelical denials of eternal punishment.

Keddie's expositions are always clear and helpful, taking the reader to the heart of the teaching of each parable. His material, if not taken directly from sermons, shows a preacher's skill in structuring his exposition. The divisions of the passages are natural, allowing the text to determine the structure, although some preachers would want to develop more striking or memorable headings. The language used is contemporary and well chosen, as are the illustrations which, wisely, are sparingly used lest they obscure material which is already vivid and striking.

The parables are also applied directly and pastorally, again evidence of a good preacher at work, and the tone is devotional in the best sense. The exegetical foundations are well laid and the application grows naturally from them.

The first chapter, on the purpose of the parables, is of vital importance for the whole book, and unfortunately it left this reviewer dissatisfied. The nature of the Kingdom of God is a much debated subject and widely differing opinions are held. More should have been said about the Kingdom to ensure that the reader grasps Jesus' dynamic view of God's reign breaking into the world in a new, powerful, definitive way. The vital distinction between the presence of the Kingdom (the "already") and the future consummation (the "not yet") is not really examined, but is left to emerge by implication as the later parables are expounded. It would be of great help to the reader to have a full understanding of these issues from the outset.

Keddie's view of the purpose of the parables does not entirely convince. Disagreeing with, for example, John Calvin, he argues that the parables were deliberately simple so that those who rejected them knew exactly what they were rejecting and thus demonstrated their hardness of heart. This, however, fails to take account of Jesus' explanation of his use of parables

in Mark 4 and Luke 8 (Keddie refers only to Matthew 13), where the use of "in order that" (Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10) shows that one purpose of the parables was to conceal truth from the wilfully blind as part of their judicial hardening by the Lord, a fact supported by the use of "lest" in Mark 4:12. This is a solemn truth, but there is much more to be said for the view of Calvin (and others such as Hendriksen) than Keddie allows.

One further reservation is the temptation, which Keddie does not always avoid, of rushing to state qualifications and produce "sound" explanations before allowing a parable to speak on its own terms with sometimes shocking force. The parables did shock. Sometimes they present only one side of an issue, deliberately so. Exposition will rightly note other Scriptural truths which balance what the parable says, but if these are set out first the power of the parable is neutralised. This comes out clearly in chapter 5, on the value of the Kingdom, dealing with the hidden treasures and the pearl of great price. The parables stress powerfully that the Kingdom is worth everything we possess, so that nothing is to stand in the way of our possessing it. Of course we cannot actually pay for it - but when that truth is set out before the parable's teaching is considered, the impact of Jesus' words is dissipated. The shocking and upsetting power of the parables needs to be preserved in the exposition.

These criticisms, however, do not prevent this book from being a very helpful treatment of the parables which will feed the soul of any reader and will build up his grasp of Scripture. Preachers will also be helped by these expositions, although they will want to do their own exegetical spadework, and only the lazy or the desperate will use them as they stand. Every preacher has to make the text his own. It is not a little gratifying, however, when the reviewer compares Keddie's exposition with his own recent sermons on some of the parables and finds a remarkable degree of similarity. By that token, he must be a reliable guide!

**W.D.J. McKay**

*Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation*, updated Edition, John Goldingay, Apollos, 1990, Pb, 207pp. £10.95.

How should the Christian Church in the modern world understand and appropriate the Old Testament? This is the absolutely crucial question that

Dr. Goldingay of St. John's College, Nottingham, addresses in this book. However if the reader comes to it hoping for a defined line of approach he will immediately be disappointed for the book's concern is not to propound any particular approach - merely to survey the various approaches that clamour for attention in the often bewildering world of contemporary critical O.T. scholarship. The book's not inconsiderable achievement is to bring such a world, which the typical O.T. student has to encounter, within our grasp in such a brief work. Goldingay has an encyclopaedic grasp of the current scholarly debate as we see from his extensive footnotes, not to mention his exhaustive 38 page bibliography. He himself believes that it is futile to look for one central category that will express the relationship of O.T. and N.T. and for one hermeneutical approach that will enable us to interpret the O.T. Rather he isolates five main trends in modern scholarship - that the O.T. presents a faith (beliefs about God and man), presents a way of life (guidance about behaviour), presents the story of salvation (or salvation history), presents a witness to Christ (especially typologically) and presents itself as a canon of Scripture. We need to explore all five areas with the help of modern scholarship if we are to discover the relevance of the O.T. to the church in the twentieth century. As can be seen these headings cover the usual loci of any O.T. course - O.T. Introduction (in which the whole question of the canon is central), O.T. Hermeneutics, O.T. Theology, O.T. History and O.T. Ethics. Thus the five chapters could serve as interesting background reading on the contemporary debate in these fields of O.T. study as the student is helped to pick his way through a bewildering mass of material.

However, what of Goldingay's own conclusions as he interacts with such modern scholarship? Sadly the Reformed reader will take issue with him at many points. Take for example his discussion of O.T. Theology in the opening chapter. He dismisses the attempt to use "covenant" as the key to organizing O.T. theology. "Arguably," he says, covenant is, "mainly a Deuteronomistic interest" - thus betraying a higher critical bias when it comes to the authorship of the Pentateuch. He goes on to declare that covenant is not "very prominent in the N.T." Anyway it is an ambiguous term. Moreover we should remember that when O.T. writers used it they did not employ it as a "technical term which could be brought into a system", but as an image or symbol "whose resonances and associations are as important as their defined meaning." The Reformed reader would of course wish to take issue with such a summary dismissal of such a precious truth. Such a reader would also be alarmed at certain statements outlining

the difference between the O.T. and N.T. in which he declares that we have a different God in both and different views of what the believer is. Likewise in his discussion of O.T. ethics we find some alarming statements concerning the Law. He sees an antinomian-legalism tension reflected not only in Scripture (Paul versus the O.T.), but in the Reformers (Luther versus Calvin and the Puritans). Moreover he sees severe 'limitations' in certain O.T. standards. Not only are they often contradictory, but "reflect sub-christian moral standards". Indeed he says "...do we not have to admit that over some issues Scripture is simply wrong and that we are more enlightened, not necessarily because we are more sensitive but because we have more information available to us" (His footnote indicates that he's thinking here of such issues as attitude to women, to slavery, to capital punishment and to homosexuality). Of course we admit that there are difficulties in interpreting and applying the O.T. However Goldingay's approach here is hardly to be recommended.

So we have here a highly informative book, but one that needs to be handled with care. It may inform the mind, but it will not do much to warm the heart of the believer.

**W.N.S. Wilson**

# BOOK NOTICES

*People in Rural Development*, Peter Batchelor, The Paternoster Press, 1993. Pb. 228pp. £9.99.

This revised and enlarged edition of Peter Batchelor's book seeks to present a Christian approach to issues at the heart of Third World development. The author has over forty years' experience of such work in Africa and is well equipped to offer a critique of some current methods of assistance and to suggest where priorities should lie. He insists that to be truly successful the work of development and social reconstruction in the Third World should be done from a Christian perspective. "A genuime concern for God's creation and for other people springs from a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. A programme founded on such a commitment is more likely to be balanced, constructive and to have lasting effects than work that ignores God" (p.154). Well written, relevant, up-to-date and informative, this book is worth reading.

*John Wesley and the Anglican Evangelicals of the Eighteenth Century*, A. Brown-Lawson, The Pentland Press, 1994. Pb. 410pp. £11.50.

The author presents a thoroughly researched "study in co-operation and separation with special reference to the Calvinistic controversies". He examines the origins of Methodism, noting the differences ecclesiastically and theologically between John Wesley and the leading evangelicals of the eighteenth century. In the theological sphere Dr. Brown-Lawson considers the first Calvinistic controversy concerning regeneration and also the extent of the Atonement; the second controversy concerning the imputed righteousness of Christ, including a discussion of perfection and perseverance; and the third controversy, justification by faith. The writer is not a Calvinist, and we would not share all his conclusions or his strictures but on the whole he writes fairly and objectively. His scholarly work meets a need and will be of considerable interest to Calvinist and non-Calvinist alike. There is an extensive bibliography and an index. An important book.

*A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies Obtruded on the Church of Scotland*, George Gillespie, Naphtali Press, P.O. Box 141084, Dallas, TX 75214, USA. 1993, hbk. 523pp. no price.

This was George Gillespie's first major work, published in his twenty - fifth year, 1637. This reprint is based on the second edition of 1660 and as been "compared, corrected and collated with the first edition." The text has been revised to reflect contemporary spelling and punctuation. Short Latin phrases and quotations are translated, while longer quotes are translated in the text with the original Latin in footnotes. Archaic words are defined and there is a useful glossary of such terms.

The historical introduction by Roy Middleton (Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Barnoldswick, England) provides a valuable background to this work. Dr John Macleod declared that "George Gillespie was one of the marvels of an age that was itself sufficiently marvellous" (*Scottish Theology*, p.79). Gillespie's intellectual prowess is apparent throughout this work which is rightly described in the Foreword as "an exhaustive defence of God's right to order the institutions of worship in His church."

This work naturally reflects the style of the seventeenth century, No stone is left unturned and one's opponent is pursued relentlessly yet with dignity and charity. The prolixity of the work should not deter the modern reader from reflecting on the crucial Reformational principles so powerfully presented and defended by the youthful Gillespie.

There is a complete index of Scripture passages, a lengthy subject index and an extensive bibliography setting forth as far as possible the particular editions of works by Gillespie, with page numbers indicating where the quotations occur. The type throughout is large and easily read and the volume is attractively produced.

Those interested in this period of Scottish Church history, or in Gillespie's writings in particular, will welcome this fine production. It is the first in a uniform collection of books by seventeenth-century divines which Naphtali Press plan to publish. It whets the appetite for what is to come.

*Thomas Muntzer: Apocalyptic Mystic and Revolutionary*, Hans-Jurgen Goertz, T & T Clarke, 1993, 229pp. hbk. no price.

Many biographies of this remarkable radical Reformer of the sixteenth-century have appeared, presenting conflicting views of an enigmatic and controversial figure. Professor Hans-Jurgen Goertz, of the Institute for Social and Economic History in Hamburg, is a leader of modern research into the life and work of Muntzer. His work, the result of long and painstaking research, has been translated by Jocelyn Jaquiery into good English.

To many Muntzer was an eccentric mystic, to others a dangerous revolutionary. Certainly he espoused the cause of the underprivileged and oppressed and his involvement in the peasants' revolt led eventually to his execution. One of the most interesting aspects of this work is the light it throws on the mutual hostility that developed between Luther and Muntzer. The *sola scriptura* of the Wittenberg theologians was not enough for Muntzer who held to direct revelations from the Spirit. And so he declared, "The Christian faith which I preach is not in accord with that of Luther" (p.139). Luther, for his part, ridiculed Muntzer's position declaring it to be of the devil.

In Muntzer there was an explosive mixture of social revolution, mysticism and apocalyptic vision. Although associated with the Anabaptist movement, he is not to be regarded as typical of the Anabaptists. It is not hard to see why the Communists claim him as a forerunner of their philosophy, a claim that does not stand close examination. Muntzer was a Protestant Reformer with tremendous potential both theologically and in terms of leadership, but fanaticism drove him from one excess to another, excesses that finally led to a bloodbath as many of his peasant followers lost their lives in futile revolt.

This latest biography makes fascinating and informative reading. A measure of understanding of Thomas Muntzer is essential to a sound and balanced appraisal of the Reformation. This book supplies that understanding.

**F.S. Leahy**

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*Operation World*, Patrick Johnstone, The Paternoster Press, 1993. Pb. £8.99. Hb. £17.99.

*You Can Change the World*, Jill Johnstone, The Paternoster Press, 1993. Hb. £8.99.

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