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LIVING IN A COVENANT COMMUNITY

We are living in a time when a seismic shift has occurred in men's thinking. The fault lines have always been there of course, indeed since the Fall, but at this point in history they are moving apart in a disturbing way. Serious tremors are being felt throughout the Western world. Even secular commentators are speaking of our collapsing culture. Man has lost his sense of majesty and any real understanding of what it means to be human. He has turned in on himself. David Wells comments that 'our culture suggests that all of the greatest treasures of life are at hand, quite simply in the self'. That is of course the oldest lie of all and appeared first in Eden, when the enemy said, 'you shall be as gods'. Philip Rieff adds that for man today 'I believe' has been replaced by 'I feel'. Yet this only serves to accentuate the emptiness which is there in all those who have turned away from the one living and true God.

Into such a world the church must speak with a voice that is prophetic and compassionate, earnest and appealing. What the church says must be confirmed by how the church lives. We need to live as a covenant community where believers are nourished in their union with Christ, where our victory over evil is assured because of Christ's triumph at the Cross and where families seek to train up the next generation in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Such a church must like those in the past, have a real missionary vision and be ready to take the Gospel far and wide.

All of these issues are addressed in this edition of the Journal. They call us to be faithful and courageous in our witness to such a needy age.

C.K.H.

AN EXPOSITION OF COLOSSIANS 2:9-15

by Rev. C. Knox Hyndman

Knox Hyndman is minister of Newtownards Reformed Presbyterian Church. He lectures on Church History in the Reformed Theological College, Belfast.

The city of Colosse was situated about one hundred miles east of Ephesus. It was not a particularly important town living rather in the shadow of its more illustrious neighbours Hierapolis and Laodicea. It had lost its former economic importance and though still significant, geographically it was, according to the Greek historian and geographer Strabo, 'a small town'.

The Church in Colosse was not founded by Paul. In chapter two of the letter he writes of 'all who have not met me personally'. The key figure was Epaphras who may well have been the founder of the congregation as appears in chapter four verse thirteen. It is likely that the congregation was founded during the time of Paul's ministry in Ephesus. (See Acts 19:10). The church itself was predominantly if not entirely Gentile as is clear from chapter 1 verse 27 and chapter 2 verse 13. The letter to the church was written from prison in Rome where Paul had been visited by Epaphras.

Conditions in the Church at the time of the Letter

The report brought to Paul by Epaphras was mostly favourable, but some matters of concern were raised and Paul seeks to address them in this letter. Colosse was a typically pagan city and a whole variety of pagan belief and practice thrived there. The particular false teaching which threatened the life of the church is difficult to define precisely. It was a 'weird mixture of Jewish and pagan element' (Hendriksen). Central to it however were several identifiable features. Of these the most prominent was an asceticism which it was claimed was the way to overcome those troublesome sins of the flesh. Promises are made to those who are trying really hard to achieve victory but are disappointed because they seem to lose so often. Faith in Christ, they are told, is fine but is not sufficient. The salvation he has brought is not complete and something more is needed. That's where the false teachers promised to help. C.D. Moule says, 'Colossian rules were meant to combat indulgences of the flesh'. It seems indeed that the word 'fulness' may well have been used by these false teachers.

In order to attain fulness i.e., knowledge, joy, holiness and power, something more is needed than what is now available through faith in Christ. You must fol-

low our directions said the heretics. This of course continues to sound familiar even in the twenty-first century. It is the essential claim of those who advocate any form of 'Second Blessing' teaching. This new insight it is claimed, will help those who follow it to reach fulness.

There was also within the false teaching an insistence on ceremonies, particularly on circumcision. Taken together the effect of false teaching was to detract from the uniqueness of Christ. 'False teachers may not directly have attacked the supremacy of Christ' says Machen, 'but neither did those who promoted the worship of saints, nor Mary as Mediatrix. But those things had the effect of robbing Christ of His rightful place in the devotion of the believer'.

Hendriksen comments, 'in this entire section (vs 1-10), Paul indicates that he was deeply concerned about the false teaching of those whose speculative theories, cleverly presented, might tend to undermine the confidence of the Colossians in Christ as their complete Saviour'. F.F. Bruce agrees when he says that the theme of these verses is 'Christ is all and all you need'.

The Glory of Christ's Person (verses 9 and 10)

Paul's view of Christ's work depends absolutely on his view of Christ's Person. He points in these verses to his deity, humanity and headship.

His Deity. This is the only place in the New Testament in which the word *theotaitys* is used. In using this word Paul is emphasizing Christ's complete equality of essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Calvin says, 'God is wholly found in Christ. God has manifested Himself to us fully and perfectly in Christ. In the Son there dwells all the fullness of absolute Godhead; they were no mere rays of Divine glory which gilded Him, lighting up His Person for a season and with a splendour not His own, but He was and is absolute and perfect God'. There is in him says Moule 'the whole glorious total of what God is'. (Chapter 1 verse 19).

His Humanity. 'In bodily form.' The fulness of Deity has its abiding residence in Christ and this bodily. Paul uses here the present tense. The fulness of Godhead is dwelling in Christ. This did not begin with the incarnation. It was always so. But that fulness does dwell bodily. It is not mystical. It is in Christ's whole human nature. The fulness of the Godhead is embodied in Christ. (Chapter 1 verse 15).

'In Him you have been made complete'. Lenski points out the significance of the periphrastic perfect: 'You have been made full, are so now and continue so.' And the passive voice indicates 'God has made you complete in Christ'. It is certain. In union with Christ our every spiritual need is fully met. Possessing him we possess all. 'Thou O Christ art all I want. More than all in Thee I find' said Charles Wesley.

Calvin rightly comments, 'This does not mean that the perfection of Christ is transferred to us, but that there are in Him resources from which we may be filled that nothing may be wanting in us'. We can readily see the pastoral importance in Colosse and for today. 'There is no need as some are trying to persuade you, to look elsewhere for help. To turn somewhere else to achieve spiritual perfection or maturity'. The Colossians faced erroneous teaching which would have caused them to doubt the all-sufficiency of their Saviour. It is an error which never goes away. Sometimes this error may appear quietly and subtly as in the teaching on the 'Second Blessing'. 'There is something more you need than you already have as a Christian'. The same error appears in different forms in legalism, asceticism and Pentecostalism. But these verses show that Christ does not fill us merely in part and leave something to be added by means of philosophy so as to fill us to the brim.

His Headship. He is sovereign over all creatures. Whatever powers there are in the universe, whatever rank or order they may hold, all owe their being to Christ and are under his Lordship. What are these authorities? Consider chapter 1 verse 16. No distinction is made here between good and bad. But whether good or bad, these angels have no power apart from Christ. Apart from him they cannot even exist. They are creatures, nothing more. Apart from him the good cannot help. Because of him the evil cannot harm. Important application of this fact comes later in verse 15.

The glory of Christ is seen then in his Deity, humanity, and headship. And it is with him that you, ordinary believing men and women in Colosse and in our congregations, are in union. You have both union and communion with this Saviour.

The All Sufficiency of Christ verses 11 - 15

'The errorists by rivetting so much attention on man-made remedies for relapse into paganism, were in reality denying the all sufficiency of Christ' says Hendriksen. Paul answers this error by stressing what Christ does for us. In him we are circumcised; with him we are buried; with him we are raised; through him we are victorious.

You were circumcised. We need first to ask, 'What is this circumcision?' The errorists were urging on the Colossian Christians the absolute necessity of physical circumcision. This, they claimed was necessary for spiritual growth. But Paul answers emphatically, 'You were circumcised'. You have been circumcised. This has in the past been done to you. He uses the passive aorist. It has been done in a way that far excels that which the errorists are now urging on you. They want you to undergo a physical mutilation of the flesh, but you have already received a vastly superior circumcision. In what way then have they already been circumcised? Clearly not physically. Rather it has been done spiritually - 'without hands'. It is internal and radical, the removal of the body of the flesh.

Circumcision was certainly literal for Jews. But it was a sign of an inward spiritual reality. Deuteronomy contains the command, 'circumcise then you hearts'. (chapter 10:16, 30) 'Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants. Unbelieving nations are referred to as the 'uncircumcised'. This circumcision is the reality of which the literal circumcision was the sign. It has effected a radical change in us. It has entailed the removal of the entire body of the sinful flesh. It is *apekdusois* i.e., the 'putting off', the word used for removal; indeed for the stripping off of clothes. It is a double compound which denotes stripping away and casting away.

What then is removed? It is says Paul the *sarx*, the flesh. Is this a reference to the body as conditioned by our fallen nature. There are too many difficulties to enable us to accept this view. The bible does use the word *sarx* to speak of man's fallen nature. Calvin defines *sarx* as 'the accumulation of corruption' and Scott sees it as 'the whole carnal nature'. This circumcision which the Colossian believers have already experienced is then the new birth, the new creation. It is the removal of the heart of stone and its replacement with the heart of flesh. The circumcision of the heart is then the circumcision of Christ. He does this work in us by his Spirit. The flesh has been completely removed. You are a new creation. Flesh is no longer on the throne ruling the body and its members, making them serve its lusts. 'do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts and do not go on presenting the members of your body as instruments of unrighteousness to God' (Ephesians 6 verses 12 and 13).

In Christ there is a radical transformation. You have received in him an inward spiritual circumcision. The old nature has been put off and you are a new creation. Putting off the sinful nature is described in another way. Its certainty and its nature are emphasized in vs 12. This is, says Hendriksen, a further description of the circumcision which the Colossians had already received. Now

it is described as being buried with Him in baptism and raised again. Calvin concludes, 'he explains still more clearly the manner of spiritual circumcision'. Here is union with Christ in his death and resurrection, for as John Murray states, 'The central import of both baptism and circumcision is union with Christ'. The circumcision of the heart was accomplished by that which baptism signified namely being buried and raised. Ursinus in the Heidelberg Catechism maintained that 'both signify our regeneration'. Murray adds, 'because the people of God were in Christ when he gave His life a ransom and redeemed them by His blood, salvation had been secured for them; they are represented as united to Christ in His death and resurrection'.

This union is, of course, by faith. Unquestionably it is by faith that we receive what is signified in baptism. This union with Christ, and all the benefits included in that union which is signified in baptism, is only experienced through faith in the risen Saviour.

There is then a clear linking of baptism with circumcision. They are spoken of in the same sentence. They refer to the same inward act of grace. As Murray puts it 'baptism is the circumcision of New Testament'. In the new dispensation baptism is by Divine authority substituted for circumcision as the initiatory sign and seal of the covenant of grace. If baptism did not take place of circumcision then the New Testament has no initiatory rite.

The benefits which flow from union with Christ (verses 13-15)

The first blessing mentioned is forgiveness. Speaking again of their former condition Paul emphasises the fact that they are dead in transgression and in uncircumcision of the flesh. Does this uncircumcision here refer to literal uncircumcision? Is it that the Colossians being Gentiles did not have the covenant sign? Or is it figurative, that inwardly they were uncircumcised?

Calvin prefers the literal sense. He emphasises that uncircumcision is the badge of alienation from God. It indicates that they were outside the covenant. And that 'there is nothing but filth and pollution'. The Gentiles in the flesh, are called 'uncircumcision in the flesh made by human hands', we read in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 11. This fits the context for Paul is emphasizing the superiority of the inward circumcision which they have received to outward circumcision and so being physically uncircumcised, he says, had not been a hindrance in becoming partakers of Christ's life. Certainly the Colossians were literally uncircumcised, but is the apostle's point here not that they were inwardly circumcised? Now inwardly they have been circumcised by grace. The physical

uncircumcision symbolized their moral and spiritual uncircumcision. It was a picture of their corrupt fallen nature. But even on you, says the apostle, grace has been bestowed. They had been morally and spiritually corrupt and dead. Their lives had been characterized by transgression against God's holy law. The dative is causal in meaning, 'deeds due to transgressions'. It is a different word than that previously used. The first word used was *periemno* but the second is *akrobustia*. This is used of a state of being as in Galatians chapter 6 verse 15.

The old uncircumcised nature is totally transformed (verse 11) Blessing has come and all transgression is forgiven. Being made alive and being forgiven are 'the same act of Divine grace, viewed under a different but complementary aspect'. The man who is made alive in Christ is the man who experiences forgiveness. This forgiveness is always gracious. Paul uses an interesting word here whose root word is *charis*, grace. Forgiveness is gracious. Even you who were uncircumcised outwardly but more importantly inwardly, and therefore in a state of sinfulness, corruption and helplessness, received this grace. Forgiveness is always gracious. Is this why Paul changes here from the second person, you to the first person plural, us? Is he saying 'and I, too, have experienced this gracious forgiveness'? As well as being gracious forgiveness is total. No sin is left unforgiven. Again we can see the pastoral application. There is no need of Judaistic regulations and observances to try and remove our sins. There is here an answer to the legalistic spirit to which believers today are also prone.

In verse 14 Paul speaks of cancellation. Several questions arise in this verse. What is the document? In what ways is it against us? How is it hostile? Considerable debate has been given to the meaning of the phrase. Literally it means handwriting (*chairographon*). But even this word has various interpretations. It is simply a document in writing, any document written by hand. Most frequently it has the technical sense of a bond, a certificate of indebtedness. This has led many commentators to a particular interpretation. Typical is that of Vaughan in the Expositors Bible Commentary. He says it is a 'self confessed indictment - a charge list as it were, which they themselves had signed and admitted was accurate 'F.F. Bruce seems to agree for he says the meaning is a signed confession of indebtedness'.

But how have the Colossians signed it. How have sinners owned up to this 'IOU'? Lightfoot answers that they have done so in two ways. The Jews signed when they bound themselves by curse to observe all the enactments of the law. In Deuteronomy chapter 27 verses 14-26 Curses were read and people say Amen. But what of the Gentiles, for the Colossian church was predominately

Gentile? Lightfoot follows Luther and says they signed in their conscience. 'The moral assent of conscience which as it were signs and seals the obligation'. Luther says 'conscience is the signature'. Conscience says to the Gentiles, these things are right and you ought to do them. Hendiksen dismisses this as merely 'a very attractive theory which lends itself beautifully to sermonizing'. It is not satisfactory. The document contains Divine decrees. These decrees have been issued by God. 'He issued them in a written document with his signature and seal affixed'. This handwriting contains all demands of his law which God made upon us.

But is this the ceremonial law or moral law? Calvin states that it is ceremonial - and only that. A strong case can be made for this view from the context of the Judaizers in Colosse. 'All those who still urge the observance of ceremonies detract from the grace of Christ, as though absolution were not procured for us through Him for they restore to the handwriting its freshness so as to hold us still under its obligation'. But no, it is obliterated. But does handwriting and law refer only to the ceremonial? Is it not true that to man outside of Christ the moral law is also against him? Hendriksen and Lenski take the view that the handwriting contains all the demands God made against us. Every person is confronted with the dictum, 'cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things that are written in the book of the law to do them'. They are against us and hostile to us. Against us because their requirement and regulations condemn us. Hostile i.e. an adversary because it bears testimony against us. Lenski sees this as a dative of repetition. The handwriting is completely, utterly against us. The word, *upenantion* is used in Hebrews 10:27 with the meaning of adversary.

What has now happened to this handwriting? It has been cancelled, that is wiped away. Writing could be washed off the surface of papyrus. Whatever was written there could be erased, leaving a sheet which was clean. Handwriting has in this way been cancelled. The same word is used in Revelation 3 verse 5 and in the Septuagint of Psalm 51 verse 1 'blot out', and in Acts 3 verse 19, 'wiped away'. He has wiped away the Law itself viewed in its demanding and curse pronouncing character and he has abrogated the ceremonial law that no remembrance of obligation to it remains.

How can handwriting be wiped away? Paul now answers in verse 14b. We might have thought that the sentence would have continued with another participle, 'having taken it'. But that is not so. Lenski sees here a deliberate and wonderful repetition. It is a new sentence which directs us to the Cross. It ensures that the Cross is central. The cancelling, blotting out and wiping away

took place at Cross. 'Taken away' is literally, 'taken out of the middle'. It is used in 1 Corinthians 5 verse 2 to speak of removal from fellowship. The perfect indicative demonstrates an abiding result. So the handwriting is removed permanently, removed so that it can never again alienate us from God. Christ bore the curse of Law and fulfilled the types and ceremonies of ceremonial law. 'Therefore my brothers, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ' (Romans 7:4). 'Now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound'. Judaizers are dealt a devastating blow. What grounds can they have when they urge Colossians to observe these ceremonies? What grounds can Colossians have for resisting false calls vs 16?

Victory

The rulers and authorities have already been mentioned. They are referred to in verse 10 but no indication is given of their activity. They are broadly described, both good and bad. 'In this verse however these rulers and authorities are unquestionably enemies. They are real spiritual beings and they are malignant. They set themselves against Christ and His Kingdom. They set themselves in war against Him. They are spoken of in Ephesians 6 verse 12, Jude verse 6 and Romans 8 verse 38. Why are they described as rulers and authorities? Satan and his angels have no inherent right to rule nor any rightful authority'. Though Adam was steward and trustee of God's creation, Satan had no authority to rule man, for man was never really his own master. There could be no sceptre of rule belonging to man which was transferable to Satan after the Fall. God has given Satan no dominion over man. How then can evil beings be described as rulers and authorities? It is a power which is usurped. Man is within the dominion of Satan only because of sin chapter 1 verse 13.

The reality is that Satan and his angels have been 'disarmed'. This word has been interpreted in various ways. It literally means to remove, strip off clothes, or divest oneself of a garment. The difficulty here is that Paul uses the middle voice. Some reach the strange conclusion that the middle is used because Christ 'stripped off from Himself' as though the powers and authorities had attached himself to him in a determination to bring about his destruction. There is no warrant for such an interpretation. Hendriksen affirms that the middle can, at times, be used as active. So Lenski interprets the verse to mean that they had usurped rule and authority and now God stripped them of it. 'He did this decisively. The rule and authority had set itself up in war against Him. So on his own behalf God stripped them. Of course that was for our deliverance for we were victims struck down in the fight against him'. The disarmament was total and decisive.

The question is often raised, 'Was the triumph by him or by 'it' i.e. Cross? Versions vary in the translation of the verse. But do we need to decide? It was Christ who triumphed and it was by the Cross that he triumphed. So we can agree wholeheartedly with Calvin here when he says 'There is no tribunal so magnificent, no throne so stately, no show of triumph so distinguished, no chariot so elevated as is the gibbet on which Christ subdued death and the devil, the prince of death; nay more, has utterly trodden them under his feet'.

Here is fulfilment of the *proto evangel* of Genesis 3 verse 15: 'He will crush your head and you will strike His heel'. Here is the Cross. As Edward Donnelly puts it, 'The seed of the woman takes the initiative, stamping down on Satan's head at the cost of pain to Himself. The Servant of the Lord insists on the bruising and despising the pain drives down His foot'.

It is a decisive victory, accomplished by Christ, by his death. Now we have encouragement in spiritual warfare. There is but one message of hope that can relieve modern man of his frustration and despair. 'Christ crucified and risen is Lord of all; all forces of the universe are subject to Him, not only benign ones but hostile ones as well. They are all subject to Him as their Creator; the latter are subject to Him also as their Conqueror. To be united to Him is to be liberated from their thralldom, to enjoy perfect freedom and to overcome all powers of evil because Christ's victory is ours'. (F.F. Bruce).

TRAINING COVENANT CHILDREN

By Robert L.W. McCollum

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Statistics indicate that many children born to professing Christian parents do not themselves profess faith in Christ and become communicant members of the church. For obvious reasons this causes not only parents but also elders in the church to be alarmed. In some congregations a whole generation of youth appear to have been lost to the world.

Some analysts conclude that this is an inevitable consequence of rearing children in an increasingly secular and humanistic society; a conclusion that finds support in the frequently repeated opinion, 'It is an awful world in which to bring up children'.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that this conclusion is invalid. Since the rebellion of our first parents in Eden sin has always abounded on earth. In this respect the 21st century is not any different from previous centuries. Why then are so many covenant children failing to respond to their covenant God and embrace Jesus Christ as their Princely Saviour? The answer to this solemn and soul searching question lies, I believe, not in the fact that the world has become more evil or that covenant children have become less responsive to the gospel but in the fact that many Christian parents are either ignorant of their privileges and responsibilities as parents or they are sinfully delinquent with respect to parental duty.

Our increasingly secular culture has affected many Christian parents, especially in the area of rearing children. Other factors have a bearing but I believe this is the principle reason why many churches face a problem with depleting numbers of youth. To address this issue we must go back to first principles and look afresh at the whole subject of training covenant children.

1 The Expectation Christian Parents Can Possess

When two Christians get married and they realise that their first child is conceived is it realistic for them to hope that that child will grow up to love and

serve the Lord? Are there biblical grounds to substantiate such a hope or is it based on mere sentiment? I believe that it is realistic for Christian parents to have spiritual ambitions for their children on the following grounds..

a *Children are a gift from God* Psalm 127 : 3 - 5

Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

These verses clearly reveal that God is not only the author of these gifts but he clearly intends them to be a blessing to the husband and wife who receive them. 'Blessed is the man whose quiver if full of them'. From this reference to children as gifts and a blessing, parents have a right to anticipate that they will grow up to share their faith in Christ

b *Children of believers are born within the covenant*

It is not my purpose in this article to write extensively on covenant theology. Nevertheless in training covenant children we need to remember the covenant status scripture confers on them.

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. Genesis 17 : 7

The covenant promise as it affects the children of believers is given New Testament recognition in several places.

The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call. Acts 2 :39

He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.' Acts 11 : 13, 14

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, 'Men, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household. Acts 16 : 29 - 31

When Christian parents grasp that God's covenant promise is extended to their children it ought to have a profound impact upon them. Apart from the

covenant promise parents would naturally be very fearful about the spiritual prospect of their children in an increasingly godless age. In contrast, by possessing and claiming the covenantal promise by faith, parents can, with expectant hearts, look to their covenant God to lead their precious little ones to himself.

A fearful spirit indicates unbelief and a lack of confidence in God's covenant promise and can have a damaging effect upon the spiritual nurture of covenant children. William Still in a sermon preached in Aberdeen in 1968 expressed this point very clearly:

I have said this before: too many Christian parents bring up their children in fear lest they will go astray, rather than in faith that they will not. That fear, expressed in the course of their first few years in a thousand ways, soon communicates itself to their sensitive souls and they become like you, preoccupied with thoughts of going astray. It is like the horrible, drawing power of a precipice. The likeliest thing in the world is that children brought up in a home where it is feared they will go astray, will go astray. They are predisposed and preconditioned to that possibility for fear comes from Satan, and by fearing where you ought to trust and quietly implement that trust by the works of faith you are bringing Satan into your home. Whenever fear tends to grip you as it may (Satan is always up to his tricks), turn at once to God and away from Satan and say, 'God, you have said and you have commanded me to say back to You what You have said to me; that these children are Yours. I will not fear, but will believe and act accordingly.'

Christian parents can possess an expectation - that their children will grow up to love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ because they come as gifts from a gracious father and the covenant promise is extended to them as children of God's children. Over and over again in the Bible we discover that God fulfils his promises through means and the same is true for the covenantal promise. With regard to the covenantal promise this is no exception.

2 The Responsibility Christian Parents Must Embrace

We do not believe in automatic blessing. Christian parents can never presume that irrespective of their behaviour and conduct their children will be saved and walk in the ways of Christ. The God who promises in the covenant to be a God to our children also clearly reveals in his Word that the parents are the primary means by which the promise is fulfilled.

For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the

LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him. Genesis 18 : 19
(See also Ps. 78 : 5 - 8)

These two references clearly and explicitly teach that God's primary means of bringing to fulfilment his covenant promise is through parental training. God has given to parents the primary responsibility of training their children in the knowledge of God. This may come as a shock to some modern parents, even some of today's Christian parents. As Tedd Tripp writes:

Many people have children but do not want to be parents. Our culture has convinced them that they need to quench their personal thirst for fulfilment. In a self-absorbed culture, children are a clear liability.²

In such a culture many children are driven off to the experts in the child care centres, to nursery schools and to numerous other specialists. Many churches are evaluated, not by the faithfulness of the preaching or the quality of the fellowship, but by the provision that is made for the children and young people. While not denying the need to enlist the help of experts outside the home to train our children in certain life skills where we can claim no expertise, God clearly lays the primary responsibility for the spiritual training of children upon the parents. The parents who fail to accept and implement this duty jeopardise the spiritual well being of their offspring. Of course there are many Christian parents today who are saying, 'I know this is our responsibility but give us guidelines whereby we may fulfil what God requires of us as parents'. God's Word is a sure guide in this respect.

I believe it is helpful for parents to think of Christ as our Mediator.³ As Mediator he mediates numerous spiritual blessings to us as he fulfils his offices as prophet, priest and king. In many respects, especially in the early years, there is a real sense by which Christian parents act as mediators of God and his Truth to their children. For example, God's Word reveals that parents are to act as prophets, priests and kings to their children and in so doing they will mediate right thoughts and concepts of God to their children.

a *Parents as Prophets*

Today we often think of a prophet as a man who foretells the future. The main task, however, of a prophet in the Old Testament was to reveal the mind and will of God to the people. In God's commission to Ezekiel he said:

Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them. Ezek. 3 : 4

And God would say to every Christian parent today, 'Go and speak my words to your children.' But before parents can effectively accomplish this they must be qualified for the task. This is clear from Deut. 6:4ff. God, in speaking to his people and revealing his identity, says to them.

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Deut. 6 : 5, 6

Before God commands parents to teach their children about him, he implores them to be whole hearted in their spiritual commitment. Their love for God is to be no half hearted-affair. Rather it is to be a love which captivates and compels and constrains the whole being of man. Parents who want to be involved in effective parenting must seek to love God with all their heart, all their soul and all their strength. If parents are to influence their children for God those children must see that their parents love God for themselves. But how is that possible? Love is not altogether visible. But actions motivated by love are visible. And so God says to his people.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

God is not asking his people for mere outward and formal obedience to his laws. Rather he is calling them to obey with a glad and willing heart. The commandments of God were to be an affair of the heart. Such an attitude to the observance of God's Word is exemplified in the testimony of the Psalmist.

Your statutes are my heritage for ever; they are the joy of my heart. My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end. Ps. 119 : 111, 112 .

By adopting such an approach to God's Word not only will Christian parents be honouring God and faithfully representing him before men but they will also be having a profound effect upon their children. In this way parents will, in some way at least, be qualified to act as prophets to their children, that is, to speak God's Word to their children. 'Impress them on your children'.
Deut. 6 : 7a

The word 'impress' means literally 'to sharpen' or 'repeat'. And in this context it means 'to teach diligently God's commands so that they may pierce deep into their heart' that is, 'to teach God's Word that a lasting impression is made on their lives.' God is saying to husbands and wives, 'I know that you have many responsibilities but of all the responsibilities you have at work, at church and at home the spiritual training of your children must have priority'. God is

saying to every Christian parent: 'The spiritual nurture of your children ought to be considered a matter of utmost importance.' Christian parents may not be qualified to teach their children physics or chemistry or biology, but as people who love the Lord and delight in his commands they are eminently qualified to teach the fundamental truths of God's Word; to teach God's Word diligently and in such a manner that it may pierce deep within the hearts of the children God has entrusted to them.

The context in which this spiritual training is to occur is also specified in this passage:

Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Deut. 6 : 7b

In parenting their children for God Christians are never off duty. When sitting around the dinner table or driving in the car parents are not only communicating what it means to live a Christ centred life by their behaviour, but they will seize opportunities in the different contexts of life to communicate God's truth.

Tedd Tripp writes:

The primary context for parental instruction is set forth in Deuteronomy 6. It is the ordinary context of daily living. Your children see the power of a life of faith as they see you living it. You do not need to be perfect, you simply need to be people of integrity who are living life in the rich, robust truth of the Word of God. Whether you are watching a video or playing a game; whether you are doing your work or fielding an unwanted phone call; whether you are being successful or smarting from failure - in the ordinary context of daily living, you show the power and viability of Christian faith.⁴

Edward Donnelly reinforces this point in his comment on the same passage.

Christian education is a total process, embracing all reality. In the family Scripture is taught - but it is also lived, and it is this combination of instruction in the truth and incarnation of the truth which is so effective. Children learn by imitating, and we are to live in such a way that in imitating us they are imitating Christ. They are to learn love, communication, obedience and forgiveness from seeing them practised in the home and being shown how they are taught in Scripture. They are to learn in the family how to worship, how to evangelise, how to make decisions. In the family God has ordained a unique structure for providing His people with a broad and deep training in His truth. No other system can replace or equal it.⁵

Of course the more of Scripture that parents have memorised the better

equipped they will be to train their children. That is the emphasis of Deut. 6:8, 9. Scripture memorisation begins in the home and ought to continue throughout all of life so that whether it is their children who are asking the questions or the neighbour down the street, parents will always be ready to give the reason to everyone who asks them of the hope they possess (1 Pet. 3 : 15).

Family worship provides the special context for instruction. This ought to be observed on at least a daily basis in every Christian home and is a practical and powerful means of demonstrating to the children that God has a central place in the life of the family. It should not be conducted in any mechanical or wooden way but rather with warmth and flexibility with a due regard for the ages of the children.

Psalm 78 gives parents tremendous encouragement to persevere in this prophetic ministry to their children

He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so that the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. Ps. 78 : 5 - 7

In contrast Judges 2 presents a clear warning.

After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. Judges 2 : 10, 11

The fact that that generation 'knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel' testifies of woeful parental neglect. The consequence was disastrous.

Of course in this matter of teaching God's Word the church will provide tremendous support through the preaching of God's Word, the Sabbath School ministry and other youth programmes. But no matter how excellent the minister, no matter how dedicated the Sabbath school teacher, no matter how engaging the youth leader they can never replace parental instruction as parents act as prophets to their children.

b *Parents as kings*

The ultimate source of all authority is Christ. 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me' said Christ shortly before his ascension. Matt. 28 : 18

Christ is now in Heaven, nevertheless he continues to exercise his rule on earth through delegated authority. For example, he has delegated authority to members of parliament to implement his rule within the state; to elders to implement his rule within the church, to managers to implement his rule in the workplace and to parents to implement his rule within the home.

Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Eph. 6 : 1

Sadly we live at a time in history when authority of every kind is being rejected and many do that which is right in their own eyes. This is clearly seen in the workplace. Historically the boss was the man with authority and to achieve his goals and the goals of the company work schedules were clearly defined; and the workers respected the boss and did their work. In other words yesterday's bosses used authority to accomplish their goals. Now old authoritarian ways are out of fashion and today's bosses use bonuses and incentives. The prevailing attitude is, 'I will work hard because there is something in it for me.'

This aspect of culture has infiltrated the family. No longer do children obey because Daddy says so, or because they know that the consequence of disobedience will be painful, but only if there is something in it for them. 'Clear up your room and I will give you 50p'. 'If you work hard at school and pass your exams I will buy you a bicycle'. Such an approach is harmful for the spiritual well being of children. Brought up in this way a child is not brought face to face with his own rebellious heart, a heart that hates authority and finds distasteful submission of any kind. It is fostering the idol of self. It breeds the attitude which says, 'I will only be obedient, I will only do what you say if you make it worth my while, if there is something in it for me'. The upshot will not only be, a citizen who goes through life constantly protesting against authority every time it surfaces, but also a sinner who will ultimately be cast into hell having refused in this life to repent of his idolatrous self centred life and submit to Jesus Christ the Lord. God calls his creatures to live under authority, and so those whom God has called to be parents should not be intimidated by our culture or embarrassed by their own sense of weakness. Rather they should thoughtfully and lovingly seek, in Christ's name, to exercise the authority he has delegated to them. The example every parent must follow is that of Christ. As sovereign Lord, Christ exercised his authority throughout his earthly ministry, with kindness, with graciousness and with a loving heart and yet with firmness. And so parents are called upon to exercise their authority not as cruel task masters but as those who truly love their children.

Of course loving parents, in the exercise of their authority, ought to be flexible enough to build into the structure of their discipline an appeals system. For example, at 10.00 o'clock you look into Johnny's room and you say 'Right Johnny, lights out, time to go to sleep', and he protests, 'but Daddy, can I not finish the chapter?' You enquire 'How many pages does that involve?' 'One and a half', he replies. 'All right but then it must be lights out.' Sometimes the appeal throws more light on the circumstances and so we adjust our stipulations accordingly.

God promises blessing to children who learn submission to authority in the home..

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother - which is the first commandment with a promise - that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth. Eph. 6 : 1 - 3

About this promise Tedd Tripp has written.

Obviously, the child who submits to parental authority is richly blessed. I grieve to see children who were never taught these issues, knocked about by life because of their rebellious, unsubmitive behaviour. By contrast, I joy to see parents internalise these issues and raise their children with a healthy respect for and submission to authority. The result is children for whom it does go well. They are respected by their teachers. They are given special opportunities. They are esteemed by their peers in the Christian community. Genuine submission to godly authority bears good fruit.⁶

When Paul speaks about the blessings which children enjoy through learning to obey Christ's appointed authority in the home, he has in mind more than just the blessings enjoyed through the good behaviour that results. He has in mind something much more fundamental than that. Where does such behaviour come from? God's Word reveals the answer.

Above all else guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life. Proverbs 4 : 23

For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. Lk. 6 : 45

From within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. Mark 7 : 21

These verses clearly indicate that the behaviour a person exhibits expresses the orientation of his heart:. All Christian parents must recognise that their chil-

dren come into this world not morally neutral, not innocent before God, but as sinners.

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child. Prov. 22 : 15

Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies. Ps. 58 : 3

Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Ps. 51 : 5

Christian parents in requiring their children to submit to authority, provide themselves with wonderful opportunities to deal with their child's natural hostility to God. The call to submit is a call to trust God rather than self. Self tells him not to submit. Self says 'Do what you want, when you want and how you want'. When children express this kind of defiance their parents should seize the opportunity to teach them about their sinful nature. Tedd Tripp develops this point.

What a wonderful opportunity to talk to children about the rebellion of their hearts! Show them how they are inclined to disobey and turn irrationally from what is good for them. Confront them with their weakness and inability to obey God without God's work within. What happens to the child who becomes persuaded that obedience is good for him? Do his problems with submission melt away? No, no more than yours do when you know what you should do. Doing what he knows is good may still elude him. This, too, takes him to God. He must learn to get hold of God for help and strength to obey. ... The Gospel seems irrelevant to the smug child who isn't required to do anything he does not want to do. It seems irrelevant to the arrogant child who has been told all his life how wonderful he is. But the gospel has great relevance for the child who is persuaded that God calls him to do something that is not native to his sinful heart - to joyfully and willingly submit to the authority of someone else! Only the power of the gospel can give a willing heart and the strength to obey⁷

Christian parents as well as talking to their child about his rebellious heart must also, when appropriate, demonstrate that rebellion has painful consequences. As God's Word reveals,

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him. Prov. 22 : 15

God says there is something wrong in the child's heart. Folly or foolishness is bound up in his heart. This folly must be removed because it places the child at risk. Throughout Proverbs folly or foolishness is used to describe the person

who has no fear of God. The fool is the one who will not bear reproof. The fool is the one who will not submit to authority. The fool is the one who mocks at the ways of God. The fool lacks wisdom. The fool's life is run by his desires and fears. Frequently parents will hear from their young children. 'I want' or 'I don't want'. It is a question of authority. Will the child live under the authority of God and therefore the authority of his parents or under his own authority driven by his own wants and passions.

Tedd Tripp makes the perceptive comment:

This is the natural state of your children. It may be subtly hidden beneath a tuft of ruffled hair. It may be imperceptible in the wry smile of a baby. In their natural state, however, your children have hearts of folly. Therefore, they resist correction. They protest against your attempts to rule them. Watch a baby struggle against wearing a hat in the winter. Even this baby who cannot articulate or even conceptualise what he is doing shows a determination not to be ruled from without. This foolishness is bound up within his heart. Allowed to take root and grow for 14 or 15 years, it will produce a rebellious teenager who will not allow anyone to rule him. God has ordained the rod of discipline for this condition.⁸

The rod, as a form of discipline, is an idea that is unfashionable at present. Our culture regards all corporal punishment as cruel and abusive. Yet parents who truly love their children will refuse to be brainwashed by the mores of an increasingly godless culture, but will be careful to implement God's command.

He who spares the rod hates his son but he who loves him is careful to discipline him. Prov. 13 : 24

A comment relating to this verse is found in Proverbs 23 : 13, 14

Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.

What is the connection between the salvation of a child's soul and a spanking? When a mother tells a child not to pull the flower heads off a beautiful house plant and yet the child, in an opportune moment, proceeds to do exactly that the mother can react in one of two ways. Either ignore the transgression or apply suitable punishment. What is the first course of action communicating to the child? Very powerfully, especially if this pattern is continually repeated, it is saying, 'There are no painful consequences to rebellion. Sin does not matter. You can transgress with impunity. And when God says in his word 'The wages of sin is death', he doesn't really mean it.' In that way the child is pro-

grammed not to take God's Word seriously. Whereas, when the appropriate punishment is consistently applied the message that is being communicated to the toddler is, 'Sin and rebellion bring painful consequences'. And in a Christian home where the gospel is being simply communicated by loving parents that child will be inclined by grace to accept Christ and so escape the wrath and curse of God due to him for sin.

Commenting on Proverbs 23 verse 14 Tripp writes:

Your children's souls are in danger from death - spiritual death. Your task is to rescue your children from death. Faithful and timely use of the rod is the means of rescue. This places the rod in its proper setting. The rod is not a matter of an angry parent venting his wrath upon a small helpless child. The rod is a faithful parent, recognising his child's dangerous state, employing a God-given remedy. The issue is not a parental insistence on being obeyed. The issue is the child's need to be rescued from death - the death that results from rebellion left unchallenged in the heart.⁹

In the exercise of parental authority the Scriptures also teach that parents, as well as requiring obedience and applying the rod when encountering wilful disobedience, should also appeal to the conscience of their children. God has given children a reasoning capacity that enables them to distinguish between right and wrong which Romans 2 : 12 - 16 defines as conscience.

This God-given conscience is a powerful ally which parents ought to engage in the process of administering discipline and correction. As Tripp points out:

Your most powerful appeals will be those that smite the conscience. When the offended conscience is aroused, correction and discipline can find its mark.¹⁰

Proverbs 23:13, 14 authorises the use of the rod. In the same chapter there are many earnest entreaties to the conscience.

Do not let your heart envy sinners. v 17

Listen, my son, and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path. v 19

Listen to your father, who gave you life. v 22

Buy the truth ... get wisdom, discipline and understanding. v 23

After Jesus told many of his parables we see him appealing to the conscience of his listeners. While appropriate to children of all ages this form of discipline is particularly appropriate for teenagers who have been nurtured from childhood in the ways of God.

c *Parents as priests*

Jesus Christ as our great high priest made the ultimate sacrifice to save us from our sins. Hebrews 7:26, 27. Parents in the training of their children for God must be prepared to sacrifice. They must be prepared for the cost that parenting involves out of love for their children and out of a desire to see them develop in a Christ-centred way..

As well as being the sacrifice for his people, Christ, according to Hebrews 7:25 'always lives to intercede for us'. In acting as priests for their children parents will find themselves in daily prayers of intercession for them. Such petitions will bring before God their physical, social and educational needs. But as soon as parents are aware that their child has been conceived in the womb their prayers of intercession will include petitions for the salvation of their little one. After the child is born they will continue to pray and pray earnestly that God will take away their child's stony heart, their child's wilful and rebellious nature and that by his grace, he will impart to their precious little one a heart of flesh, a heart to submit to divinely appointed authority, a heart to turn away from sin and to embrace Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, a heart to love God. Such parents will pray that God will use the means appointed to fulfil their earnest pleas; their consistent walk with Christ; their patient teaching of God's Word, their constant insistence on obedience, their earnest entreaties to the conscience and the public ministry of the Word on the Lord's Day. As such parents pray before God, they will plead with God on the basis of the covenant promise. They will cry out to God. 'Lord not only have you promised to be a God to me but also to my children after me. So Lord, be my children's God and save them by your grace that they may grow up to love and serve you too'.

John G Paton, a famous missionary to the New Hebrides, writes in his autobiography about a little room in his family home.

Thither daily, and oftentimes a day, ... we saw our father retire, and 'shut to the door'; and we children got to understand by a sort of spiritual instinct (for the thing was too sacred to be talked about) that prayers were being poured out there for us, as of old by the High Priest within the veil in the Most Holy Place."

Not only will parents pray in such a manner but, in a spirit of faith, they will be looking, with expectation, to see evidence of grace emerging in the lives of their children. They will be looking for a sincerity and reality in their prayers, a willingness and even enthusiasm to participate in family worship, an emergence of the fruit of the Spirit and an evident love for Christ and his people.

When we see these evidences of grace we should encourage the child, thanking God for these signs of his blessing and asking him to continue to work mightily and powerfully in the child's life.

As covenant children grow up within the home and are evidently displaying a submissive heart it is vital that then parents show trust and confidence in them. It is not only God honouring to trust our covenant offspring when they make tentative steps out of the nest, but such confidence placed in them brings a rewarding response.

Philip Howard, grandfather of Elizabeth Elliott, writes:

Given a right relationship to Jesus Christ, with the consequent moral awareness and sustaining grace, and an intimacy in everyday problems with a father upon whom he can count for an understanding sympathy, the boy responds to trust by honouring it. His life is enriched by your confidence, and impoverished by your suspicions.¹²

Parents therefore are to act as prophets, priests and kings to their children. And in seeking to be faithful prophets they must constantly be learning from Christ, having him as their daily prophet. And parents will only be able to recognise the urgency and importance of their priestly duties if they truly esteem the worth of Christ, their great high priest, who lived and died and rose again for them and who in Heaven, at God's right hand, daily intercedes for them. In relation to the kingly rule of parents it is vital that they live in daily submission to the great King, Jesus Christ, if they are to gain the respect and admiration of their children.

3 The Experience Of Fulfilment

A true understanding of the covenant of grace, as this is applied to Christian families who are careful to live in covenant faithfulness, will lead to many blessings. One glorious blessing is that many of the children growing up in such homes will experience the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in the tender years of childhood. Of course there will seldom be a conscious awareness of this experience and they will simply confess their faith in Christ by saying that they never remember a time when they did not love Jesus Christ, when they were not looking to him as Saviour and Lord. Of course such professions are tested when children from covenant homes become more and more exposed to the temptations and allurements of this godless age. If their profession is in fact

based upon the regenerating grace of the Spirit then they will stand firm when tempted, but if not, then the true state of their heart will soon become apparent.

John Murray writes about childhood regeneration:

Where regeneration takes place in the case of an infant there is the immediate transition from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God, and even though intelligent faith cannot be in exercise, nevertheless there is that which we may and must call the germ of faith. The regenerate infant is not under the dominion of sin, is not a child of wrath, but a child of God and a member of his kingdom. He grows up in the nurture of the Lord in the highest sense of that term. It will take years, of course, for the infant concerned to arrive at explicit consciousness of the implications of that regeneration and of the salvation it involves.¹³

The experience of salvation does not always occur in childhood or youth. Parents are sometimes tested. They may never live to see their children coming to faith. And in the mystery of the Divine Will there will be those children like Esau, who despise their birthright and who become breakers of the covenant, and for whom the fury of God's righteous judgement will be reserved. Such exceptions ought never to cause parents to lose sight of what all parents should earnestly pray for, the regeneration of their offspring in the tender, formative years of life, offspring who will eventually take their place with them at the Lord's Table as those who publicly profess faith in Christ.

Although parents have the primary responsibility the church has also a role. At the baptism of covenant children in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland the members of the congregation vow: 'Do you promise to pray for this covenant child and to seek by example and precept to encourage him to walk in the ways of the LORD?' As members fulfil this vow they too, along with the minister and elders, are involved in the training of the church's covenant youth. As parents and church cooperate in this vital task they can with prayerful confidence ask Christ to bless their efforts in nurturing the next generation for him so that by God's grace '... the children of your servants will live in your presence; their descendents will be established before you'. Ps. 102 : 28

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COLUMBANUS: IRISH MISSIONARY IN EUROPE

by A.C. Gregg

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It was at Nantes near the mouth of the Loire river in Western France that the matter was being decided. The question was whether or not this Irish missionary and his companions would be expelled from mainland Europe and sent back to their homeland. The details of what transpired are not exactly clear, which is not altogether surprising given that the year was circa 610 A.D. The story is that,

a storm blew up which drove the ship aground. For three days the captain failed to re-float his vessel; then, taking it as a sign that he was not to co-operate in the expulsion of the (missionaries) from Gaul, he put themselves and their belongings ashore, and friend and foe alike were convinced that God wished Columban to stay.¹

However, it is quite probable that the officials involved in the expulsion had little enthusiasm for their commission and were prepared to disobey the orders of a king and allow the Irish missionaries to remain on the European mainland. In a letter written from Nantes Columbanus stated,

As I write, a messenger has just arrived to say there is a ship ready to sail and to take me back to my native land against my will. But if I try to escape, there is no guard here to stop me. Indeed, it seems as if they want me to escape. If I am thrown into the sea like Jonah, whose name is the Hebrew for dove (Columba), pray that there will be someone to play the part of the whale, and smuggle your Jonah back safely to the land he longs for.²

Whatever the truth of the matter, Columbanus and his friends were not forced to return to Ireland.

Sources

Given the length of time that has elapsed it is pleasantly surprising to discover that there are remarkably good sources of information on Columbanus.

Of all the Irish personages of our period (that period being 400-700 A.D.) none is more accessible than Columban (or Columbanus). This is because we have inherited a vast corpus of his own writings.....Columban was a prolific writer. Happily, although many of his works have perished, many have survived - a rich legacy. The saint produced several different types of writings: letters, sermons, rules, poems...³

These sources give us an invaluable insight into the life, character, scholarship, background and convictions of the man. ⁴

So we have writings by Columbanus himself but,

we are also fortunate to have a very early and comparatively reliable *Life* of the saint, Jonas's *Vita*⁵

Jonas's *Life* is a classic example of the hagiographical genre. Its author was born in the small Piedmontese town of Susa, in the foothills of the Italian Alps, close to the modern French border. Jonas was eminently qualified to act as Columban's biographer. He had entered the saint's foundation of Bobbio in 618, three short years after the demise of his subject. There he undoubtedly became acquainted with the personal friends and associates of Columban. From early in his career he acted as secretary to Columban's successors at Bobbio - Attala (615 - c.626) and Bertulf (c.626 - 640). It follows from this fact that he was recognised as being a competent amanuensis and fit for the task of writing the definitive *Life of Columban*.⁶

Among other considerations Jonas may have been encouraged to undertake the task because of his,

consciousness that he and Columban were in a sense namesakes. For Jonas was the Hebrew of the Latin *columba*, the dove.⁷

Although it has its limitations this *Life* of Columbanus by Jonas is seen as the second 'most important historical document of the seventh century'⁸ and it,

lies behind everything that has been written about Columban by all the scholars ever since⁹

There can be reasonable confidence that,

from these documents (Columbanus' own writings and Jonas' *Life*), aided by the general history of the age wherein Columbanus played a leading political as well as religious part, we can construct a strictly historical life of this great missionary.¹⁰

Leinster

It is already clear that our subject is not always given exactly the same name. Indeed he is variously referred to as Colum, Columba, Columban and Columbanus. One thing that is necessary is to distinguish Columbanus from Columba/Columcille of Iona for they have been often confused. The two men have been differentiated neatly as follows :

They were both Irishmen, indeed, and both born in the sixth century. Columba was an Ulster man, however, Columbanus a Leinster man. Columba was born in 521; Columbanus was more than twenty years his junior, having been born in 543. Columba was the apostle of Scotland or Caledonia; Columbanus never set foot in Scotland. He was the apostle of Burgundy, Switzerland, and Northern Italy. Columba spent his life among the Pictish pagans of North Britain; Columbanus laboured among the pagans of Central Europe.¹¹

Columbanus, then, was born in the province of Leinster c.543 A.D. 'Modern scholars think it was on the border of today's counties Carlow and Wexford.'¹² He was privileged to be brought up in a Christian or at least a religious home.

His parents were probably of relatively low degree for no hint is given that his were royal or noble antecedents; if he had been of aristocratic parentage the fact would undoubtedly have been mentioned.¹³

As he grew up, his parents saw to it that he was given a good education. He studied the usual subjects of the time : grammar, rhetoric, geometry and sacred scripture.¹⁴

As a young man he was strikingly handsome and he became aware that local girls, one in particular, were being attracted by his good looks. This was something that troubled him because he was already feeling called to a life of serving God, which in his situation meant living a celibate life in a religious community. As he struggled regarding his call he sought the advice of an anchoress, a God-fearing woman who had for many years lived a solitary life of prayer and sacrifice. 'Her words were stark and uncompromising' :

You must flee, young man, you must flee from the ruin that has engulfed so many. You must leave the path that leads only to the gates of hell.¹⁵

Columbanus 'returned home no longer in any doubt about where his future lay'. His mother was strongly opposed to his decision and did all she could to make him change his mind. But all to no avail.

The day came that he had set for his departure. She still refused to accept his decision and begged him tearfully to stay. He refused. In a moment of high drama, she threw herself across the threshold of the door to prevent him leaving. He made what must have been the hardest decision of his life. He told her not to weep for him. Then he stepped over her prostrate body and firmly walked away from his home, never to return.¹⁶

At least that is how the situation was presented by Columbanus' biographer, Jonas.

Cleenish, Co. Fermanagh and Bangor, Co. Down

When Columbanus left his home in Leinster, 'presumably in his late teens or early twenties', it is believed that he first went to a centre based at Cleenish, an island of Upper Lough Erne. This school had been founded a few years earlier by Sinell, a disciple of Finnian of Clonard. As Sinell was 'a man renowned for his scholarship as well as his holiness (Cleenish) was an ideal place for a young man to continue his education.'¹⁷ He 'was obviously one of Sinell's best pupils'. 'He studied the psalms till he knew them by heart'.¹⁸ While he was still a young man he 'compiled a learned commentary on the psalter, which has not survived.'¹⁹ It may even have been written while he was still a student at Cleenish or it could have been composed when he was in his next location.

After a few (possibly six) years Columbanus moved from Cleenish to the community at Bangor, Co. Down, a centre which had been founded by Comgall c.558.

Bangor was an exciting place in those days. It was still in its infancy, having been started only a few years before. Its founder, the great St Comgall, was now about fifty years of age, and at the height of his fame and influence. The community over which he presided as abbot was young, vigorous, enthusiastic and growing at an astonishing rate. The community eventually grew to number four thousand....Bangor was not only a place of prayer. It was a seminary, it was a university, it was a centre of arts and sciences, it was a town.²⁰

Life at the community was 'regulated by the rule' and was simple, strictly disciplined and austere. But it was then 'at the height of its fame (and) a place where the greatest attainments in learning and sanctity were possible.'²¹ Columbanus was ordained during his time at Bangor.

His talents led to his appointment to teach and in time he became the chief lecturer in the monastic school there.²²

He continued his work of writing which he had begun at Cleenish. Among other literary pursuits,

he was experimenting with verse and producing poems on religious themes. Some of these were intended to be set to music and sung as hymns. The poem *This World Will Pass* (*Mundus iste transibit*) is thought to have been written at this period. It describes the fleeting nature of all human desires and ambitions, and ends with the one thing that does not pass, the vision of God that has been promised to the just.²³

Annegray, Luxeuil, and Fontaines

After spending 'many years' in Bangor, Columbanus, 'now well into his forties', felt called by God to a new mission. He had never been able to forget the words of the recluse woman he had consulted as a young man :

if I were not a weak woman I would have crossed the sea to find a greater place of pilgrimage.²⁴

She could only experience 'green martyrdom' while he was capable of 'white martyrdom'. No doubt he was also encouraged by the reports of the success of his near-namesake, Columcille, whose mission in Scotland had begun about a quarter of a century earlier. At first Comgall, the abbot of Bangor, was most reluctant to release him.

Columbanus was a man on whom he had come to rely, perhaps the man who would succeed him as abbot when he himself had died. The departure of such a man would be a blow, not only to Comgall, but to the whole future of the (community). It took all of Columbanus's powers of persuasion to make the old man change his mind. Eventually he yielded, acknowledging that the needs of the Church in Europe were greater than those of Ireland.²⁵

Columbanus was now free to 'peregrinate' and fulfil his desire 'to visit the heathens, and that the gospel be preached to them by us'.²⁶ He sailed away from Ireland c.590 with the customary twelve companions, among them Gall and Deicholus, 'both of whom became famous for their missionary work in France and Switzerland.'²⁷ The missionaries spent some time in Britain on the way before landing in Gaul. The social, political and religious depredation that greeted them on their arrival on mainland Europe could easily have been overwhelming. The generally shocking state of affairs can be gauged from the following quotations :

The country had reached a comparatively high degree of civilisation as a colony of the Roman Empire in the first centuries of the Christian era, but this civilisation was utterly destroyed when the Vandals, Huns, and Franks became the masters of the West of Europe.....The Franks, after a time, embraced Christianity, but, though nominally Christians, they still retained the worst vices of barbarity and paganism. Even after their conversion they remained as vicious and as brutal as before, and the people over whom they ruled were reduced to ignorance and savagery.²⁸

It is difficult to conceive a more dark and odious state of society than that of France under her Merovingian kings.....In the conflict or coalition of barbarism with Roman Christianity, barbarism has introduced into Christianity all its ferocity, with none of its generosity or magnanimity. Its energy shows itself in atrocity of cruelty, and even of sensuality.....Throughout, assassinations, parricides, and fratricides intermingle with adulteries and rapes.....That King Clotaire should

burn alive his rebellious son with his wife and daughter is fearful enough, but we are astounded even in these times with a bishop of Tours burning a man alive, to obtain the deeds of an estate which he coveted. Fredegonde sends two murderers to assassinate Childebert, and these assassins are clerks. She causes the Archbishop of Rouen to be murdered while chanting the service in the church; and in this crime a bishop and an archdeacon are her accomplices.....Marriage was a bond contracted and broken on the lightest occasion. Some of the Merovingian kings took as many wives, either together or in succession, as suited either their passions or their politics. Christianity hardly interferes even to interdict incest.²⁹

At the time Columbanus arrived in Gaul the country was made up of three kingdoms. **Neustria** was the north-western portion (excluding Brittany), comprising the territory lying roughly between the Loire and the Meuse rivers. **Austrasia** was the area east of this as far as the Rhine and beyond it, continuing up the basin of the Rhine into Switzerland. **Burgundy** was the region south of this, stretching as far as the Rhone valley.

The Irish missionaries landed in the north-west and it appears that King Chlothair II of Neustria would have been glad to have them settle in his kingdom. However, Columbanus travelled on towards the south-east and he was well received by King Gunthram of Burgundy. Gunthram, incidentally, was 'remembered for piety' and as a 'good king' after his death (in 593) and a French historian has expressed the reason :

not more than two or three murders can be fastened on him!³⁰

With Gunthram's permission Columbanus chose a wild and desolate area in which to settle.

He made his first foundation at Annegray in the Vosges Mountains on the border between Austrasia and Burgundy. The site he chose had once been a Roman fort and was adapted by Columban to suit his purposes, with the old Temple of Diana being transformed into a chapel for his community. Very rapidly the fame of Columban spread. Men from every social stratum joined him. His following increased so much that he was forced to establish a second (centre) at Luxeuil, eight miles west of Annegray, and this was soon to become his most important foundation. But even this did not meet the demand which he generated and as more disciples flocked to his side he was required to set up another (centre) at Fontaines, only three miles to the north of Luxeuil. *The Life of Saint Valericus* states that the number of disciples in Columban's three French houses was two hundred and twenty. ³¹

Not many years passed before Columbanus began to encounter opposition.

His relations with the bishops were often restrained. For a start, his austere and dedicated life was a constant reproach to the worldly prelates of the time.³²

A modern book written in a popular style states :

before long he clashes with the region's bishops, who are nettled by his presence. Still employing the old Roman episcopal pattern of living urbanely in capital cities and keeping close ties with those who wear crowns, the bishops tend their local flocks of literate and semiliterate officials, the ghostly remnants of the lost society. It has never occurred to these churchmen to venture beyond a few well-tended streets into the rough-hewn mountain settlements of the simpler Sueves. To Columbanus, however, a man who will take no step to proclaim the Good News beyond the safety and comfort of his own elite circle is a poor excuse for a bishop.³³

Publicly, the controversy between Columbanus and the Gaulish hierarchy revolved around issues such as the authority of the local bishops, the method of calculating the date of Easter and the tonsure (hairstyle!). Columbanus had little regard for 'contextualization'! The truth was that the Irish Church had developed independently of continental Christianity and of the See of Rome. Columbanus did communicate (in 600) with Pope Gregory the Great, mainly on the subject of the Easter question.

This letter, while couched in the most respectful terms to the great Roman prelate, shows vividly the writer's independent position and his determination to stand by the traditions of his own Church whether the Pope approved or disapproved.³⁴

Columbanus wrote another epistle, this time to the French bishops when he had been summoned to appear before the Council of Chalon-sur-Saone (603) to discuss the matters in dispute.

This he refused to attend, sending instead a defiant and witheringly sarcastic letter, outlining his position.³⁵

His non-attendance and his letter won him no friends among the members of the Council.

In the meantime, however, even sterner opposition was unfolding from another source. What had happened was that the political landscape of Gaul had changed. By 595 Burgundy and Austrasia had been effectively united. Theudebert II began to rule in Austrasia while his younger brother, Thierry II (Theuderich II), became king in Burgundy. But these brothers were both still minors and their grandmother Brunhilde/Brunhault (the spelling varies) constituted herself as their guardian and acted as regent on their behalf. Brunhilde was a monarch of her times, or worse!

Her methods changed little with the years. Murder, poison, arson were her favourites; they were tidier than war.*

At first there was a good relationship between Columbanus and the youthful king Trierry (Theuderich) of Burgundy. Thierry 'used often to visit Columbanus at Luxeuil humbly to beg the favour of his prayers'.³⁷ However, as the king grew up he 'preferred concubines to lawful wedlock'.³⁸ This licentious lifestyle was encouraged by Brunhilde with a view to serving her own twisted ambitions. Such profligacy led inevitably to Columbanus admonishing and rebuking Thierry for his loose living, something resented by the king and more so by his shameless grandmother.

Matters came to a head one day when Columbanus paid a visit to Brunhilde. When he entered the house, she introduced him to Theuderich's children by his various mistresses. 'These are the king's children,' she said. 'Strengthen them with your blessing' Columbanus saw the trap that had been laid for him. To refuse his blessing to the children would be an unfriendly act, but to give it would mean he recognised them as the king's lawful offspring. With characteristic bluntness, he refused. '*Know this,*' he told her: '*These children will never inherit royal sceptres for they are born of harlotry.*' Then he turned on his heel and walked out, leaving her seething with rage.³⁹

It was now 'open season' for the combined Church and State enemies of Columbanus. The charge was led by Brunhilde and she pursued her quarry relentlessly. At first there were unreasonable demands about free access for all to every part of the communities' complexes. There were threats about future support for the communities being withheld. Orders were issued to local people to boycott the centres. Then Columbanus was arrested and taken to Besancon. He was not put under restraint there so, after a time, he slipped back quietly to Luxeuil. He would not be easily expelled from the area. 'I left my native land for the love of Christ;' he said, 'I shall not leave this place unless I am forced to.' Finally, steps were taken to expel Columbanus from all of Gaul and send him back to Ireland. He and his Irish (and possibly Breton) followers were arrested c.610, 'almost two decades since the foundation of Luxeuil.'

Their destination was Nantes, the nearest Atlantic port, some six hundred miles away. It was an exhausting journey for a group of ageing men, including Columbanus himself, in their late sixties. The first part of the way was travelled on foot and took them through Besancon, Avallon and Auxerre.....At Nevers they reached the banks of the Loire, and boarded a river-boat which would bring them the rest of the way to Nantes.....The group continued on their way downstream towards the sea. At Orleans they had difficulty in finding food until a Syrian woman brought them to her home and looked after them.....At Tours Columbanus prayed at the tomb of the great St Martin, and was entertained in the bishop's house.....Finally they arrived at Nantes, where they were to await a boat for Ireland.⁴⁰

The sequence of events at Nantes is not clear but the outcome was that Columbanus remained on European soil.

Bregenz and Bobbio

Following the abortive attempt to deport Columbanus at Nantes the missionaries were free to go wherever they wished, except of course to the region of Burgundy. They made their way northwards to Soissons the court of Chlothair II who still reigned in Neustria. The offer made to Columbanus on his first arrival in Gaul to settle in Neustria was renewed. However, once again, the Irish missionary desired to travel further.

By the time he left Soissons, Columbanus had decided to make for Europe's ultimate wilderness, the Alps. He was accompanied by a royal escort from Soissons to Metz, where King Theudebert of Austrasia had his court. Here he was honourably received by the king, who promised him every assistance in his plans for a (community) in the Alpine region of his kingdom. Here too he had the joy of meeting many of his comrades from Luxeuil, who had left the (centre) in order to be once again with their old leader. After consultations with them and with the king, he decided to set up his new mission in the abandoned town of Bregenz on the shores of Lake Constance in the heart of the Alps. There were in the vicinity barbarian tribes who had never yet had the Gospel preached to them.

The king provided them with a boat and oarsmen for their journey. First they went down the Moselle to its meeting with the Rhine. Here they turned south and pressed their way upstream along the great river towards the Alps. Their voyage took them along one of the most famous waterways of Europe, past the steep hills and crags that are crowned today with the ruins of romantic castles. This memorable voyage inspired Columbanus to write one of his best known poems, the *Carmen Navale* or Boating-Song. The catchy rhythms and repeated refrains suggest that it may have been written for the rowers to sing as they bent their backs to the oars.⁴¹

Voyaging on up the Rhine and its tributaries, the Aare and the Limmat, the party came to Lake Zurich. They resided for a brief period at Tuggen where they had limited evangelistic success among people who worshipped the pagan god Woden/Wotan. From Tuggen they continued on by way of Arbon to their planned destination, the deserted Roman town of Bregenz on the eastern side of Lake Constance. 'In such an old fort he had started life at Annegrav; it seemed the place to which God was directing him.'⁴²

Columbanus' time at Bregenz, however, was destined to be short, a period of less than two years. For one thing the place itself did not appeal strongly to him. Then their robust approach to evangelism, especially by Columbanus' close colleague Gall who had learned the local language, provoked determined opposition. But the deciding factor had to do, yet again, with political developments. Civil war broke out between the two brothers, Theudebert II of Austrasia and Thierry II (Theuderich II) of Burgundy. The Austrasian army was first defeated at Toul and then in the decisive battle of Tolbiac (612) the

Austrasians were annihilated. King Theudebert was captured and beheaded shortly afterwards. Burgundy and Austrasia were now ruled by one king. Columbanus had lost his patron and protector 'and found himself once more within the jurisdiction of his old foes', Thierry II and Brunhilde.

He began to think about moving on again. He decided to go south of the Alps to the kingdom of Lombardy, which stretched across the plains of northern Italy.⁴³

The decision of Columbanus to cross the Alps into Italy was not popular with some of his followers, Gall in particular. When the time came to leave Bregenz, either because of a desire to remain or an illness or a combination of both, Gall did not travel with the group. This decision of Gall was a source of annoyance to Columbanus, but Gall was to go on to make a very significant impact on the region.

Gall had already learned the dialect of the area, and had considerable success in leading the people away from the practice of idolatry. He built a cell near Lake Constance, and had so great an influence in the area that a church was built there in his honour after his death. St Gall was accepted as the apostle of the Swiss nation, and the town and canton of St Gall derive their name from him.⁴⁴

Columbanus, and those who did accompany him, set off southwards from Bregenz.

Whatever pass he took through the Alps must have been a severe trial for a man of seventy, involving as it did an ascent to over seven thousand feet before the Plain of Lombardy began to appear in the distant south.⁴⁵

In Milan, the capital of Lombardy, Columbanus was kindly received by King Agilulf and Queen Theudelinda.

The Lombards were a Germanic tribe who had settled in the north of Italy. They had been converted to Christianity, but it was the heretical Arian form of Christianity which denied that Jesus Christ was God as well as man. The king, an Arian like his people, was married to (an orthodox) wife, and he raised no objection when Columbanus began to preach a series of sermons in which he expounded the orthodox faith and exposed the errors of Arianism.....Thirteen of the sermons he preached have been preserved for us, and they deal with many aspects of the Christian faith. They expound the main doctrines of the Church, they lay down the moral principles which guide human actions, they call their listeners to a deeper life of prayer.....The sermon that made most impact was one on the frailty of human life, which repeated themes he had treated in his early poem *This World Will Pass*.....Columbanus himself was now seventy years of age, and coming to the end of his own road. But there was one work still to be done.*

A man drew the attention of King Agilulf to a tract of land called Bobbio, nearly seventy miles south of Milan near the River Trebbia. It was on the north-

ern slopes of the Apennines and there was a derelict church building in the district.

It was the sort of terrain after which the Irishman seemed to hanker - wild, well-watered, wooded and remote. The king offered the site to Columban together with the land within a perimeter of four miles, and the Irishman accepted gladly. He was surely pleased to be moving once more from the affairs of kings and bishops to the solitude which he loved.⁴⁷

Columbanus moved to Bobbio some time in the year 613 and this was to be his final settlement. They first repaired the church and then set to work on the other buildings of the complex. 'Despite his age (Columbanus) took a full part in every stage of the work'.

Meanwhile back in Gaul political events took yet another twist.

Thierry's (Theuderich's) triumph had proved short-lived. Within a few months of his victory, he was struck down by fever and died. He left no one to inherit his territories except his illegitimate children, the ones Columbanus had refused to bless.

Chlothair, King of Neustria, had remained neutral up to this. Now he moved in for the kill. He still had to deal with Thierry's grand-mother, the indomitable Brunhilde. She declared the eldest of Thierry's children, the twelve-year-old Sigebert, to be the new king, and made herself regent. When Chlothair advanced with his army, an Austrasian army led by the boy Sigebert offered no effective resistance. Chlothair was now master of the three kingdoms. For the first time since Clovis (481 - 511), all France was ruled by a single king.

In his hour of victory, Chlothair proved himself a typical offshoot of the ignoble Merovingian dynasty. He showed no mercy to anyone who posed the slightest threat to his rule. He had Sigebert and all the other children of Thierry put to death. Nor did Brunhilde's age or sex save her. She was tied by her hair to the tail of a wild horse, which galloped off, dragging her along until she was battered to death.⁴⁸

King Chlothair remembered Columbanus, the good advice and the admonitions (largely ignored) that he had received from him. He sent a high-ranking delegation, led by Eustasius the new abbot of Luxeuil, all the way to Bobbio to urge Columbanus to return and settle in Gaul. Columbanus refused the request. He sent a letter to Chlothair which has not survived but which, according to his biographer Jonas, was 'filled with castigations'.

As far as we know, that letter was the last to be written by a man now close to death. It is entirely fitting that his last letter should have been a passionate denunciation of tyranny and injustice. During his life, he had never hesitated to rebuke those who deserved rebuke, no matter how high their station. There was no reason why he should act any differently now that he faced death.⁴⁹

Columbanus died at Bobbio on 23rd November 615 aged seventy-two. In the words of Jonas, 'now that he had completed his blessed life, his soul was released from his body and he gave it back to heaven'. 'In recognition of his work in the area, the beautiful town of San Columbano was named in his memory.'⁵⁰ In later centuries a Waldensian church came into existence at Bobbio and it is there to this day.

This Irish missionary was a most important figure in his day and he, and those who followed him, accomplished much in the work of furthering the cause of Christ.

When we analyse the character of Columban...we discover someone - albeit gigantic in stature - strikingly contemporary: a man of action, perception, shrewdness, bluntness, courage and tenacity. It is little wonder that he is still acknowledged as one of a handful of Irishmen who have contributed significantly to the history of western Europe.⁵¹

It is obvious that the Irish peregrini and their disciples made an enormous impact on western Europe in the sixth and seventh centuries. What is most apparent is that Columban stood head and shoulders above all his contemporary Irishmen, each of them significant in his own right, in this vast mission territory. He worked with titanic energy for a mere twenty-four years in France, Switzerland, Austria and Italy and inspired followers to toil in places which he himself did not manage to reach.⁵²

Columbanus is largely forgotten in our times. The ways in which he is recalled are sometimes questionable and sometimes harmless enough. A Roman Catholic secret society called 'the Knights of St Columbanus' came into existence in Ireland in 1922. A number of Roman Catholic missionary organisations bear the Irishman's name. Many local churches, Protestant as well as Roman Catholic, in various parts of the world, use the name of Columbanus. His name is sometimes used as an inspiration to political as well as religious unity. Robert Schuman, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs and architect of the European Community, saw him as his forerunner. 'St Columbanus,' he said, 'is the patron saint of those who seek to construct a united Europe.' Sean McBride likewise said, 'St Columban is not only a great Irishman but one of the greatest Europeans of his time.' On 23 November 1983 the 'Columbanus Community of Reconciliation' was set up in Belfast.

This is a residential community of Protestants and Catholics who bear witness to their common Christianity by their joint prayer, crossing of religious barriers and mutual respect for different Christian traditions.⁵³

Perhaps the best way for Columbanus to be remembered is for him to be seen as an inspiration to committed missionary endeavour on mainland Europe

which is still in dire need of hearing the message of saving grace, while at the same time not neglecting to proclaim the good news of the gospel in the once-called 'land of saints and scholars' of which Columbanus was a son.

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CALVIN AND THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE

by Frederick S. Leahy

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There is a veritable maze of conflicting assessments of Calvin and his theology. Among Calvin scholars consensus is lacking. Too often they remould Calvin in their own theological system - a temptation of which all should be aware and which inevitably results in an almost endless line of incompatible judgements.

Most, if not all, of these antitheses ... are the result of the particular set of theological spectacles through which Calvin has been viewed by writers of rather varied interests and intentions, and most of them fail to recognize the extent to which the antithesis itself is resident in modern scholarship - not in the thought of the sixteenth century. Calvin's thought has, in short, been avidly deconstructed by nineteenth and twentieth century writers in search of a theological or religious ally or, occasionally, in search of a historical source for the theological trials of the present.¹

In studying Calvin, while recognizing that no translation of his work is perfect, there is need to look for the labours of responsible and conscientious translators. It will not do, for example, to endorse the statement of William Bouwsma (in his less than satisfactory *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait*),²

As my work progressed, I found that my translations tended to be increasingly free, but I have taken this as a sign of growing confidence that I understand Calvin's meaning.³

Such a brand of dynamic equivalence carries its own inherent risks. As Professor Richard Muller comments,

Bouwsma's reading of Calvin's text and his identification of fundamental motifs in Calvin's thought tends to proceed from broad concepts generated by Bouwsma against the generalized 'anxiety' of the age, rather than from the texts as set in their actual literary and historical context - with the result that the generalizations do not often conform to Calvin's actual usage.⁴

As Muller points out, 'Calvin's text itself and the express statements that Calvin made about the nature, content, method, and arrangement of his work are

still available for us to examine. And where there is text, there is hope'.⁵

At this point it is important to bear in mind the impact of postmodernism on hermeneutics in general. As Susan Schreiner has shown, this has resulted in the rejection of such concepts as objectivity, transparency and transcendence, and the abandonment of the search for authorial intention. Nothing is left but text and even that is said to resist definitive interpretation. The writer is seen as beyond 'reach'. As Schreiner puts it, 'Interest is focused ... on the inherent contradictions, indeterminacies, and discontinuities in written language so that the meaning in texts is endlessly deferred'.⁶ Many scholars feel free to deconstruct and reconstruct according to taste, and the Bible does not escape their attention, so that, to use a favourite expression of Calvin, it becomes 'a nose of wax' easily turned in any direction. In view of the vagaries of postmodernism, it may well be asked where rationality ends and irrationality begins.

Turning to Calvin, it becomes clear that his work has not escaped the sieve of postmodernism and even before that phenomenon, was accommodated to the views of liberal theologians. The way in which his view of Scripture has so often been presented provides an example of such accommodation.

I. The Reconstructed Calvin

Liberal scholars are almost unanimous in stating that Calvin accepted Scripture as his sole authority, in contradistinction to the composite norm of Rome. But they usually hasten to add that this did not mean that he was a 'fundamentalist' in the sense of holding to biblical inerrancy. Indeed they insist that Calvin found plenty of errors in the Bible. A few examples of such allegations must suffice.

B.A. Gerrish writes

The word of God, in Calvin's theology, is by no means simply equated with the Bible. It is true that he treats the words of the Old and New Testament as oracles from the very mouth of God. 'Scripture says' and 'the Holy Spirit says' are used synonymously throughout his Institutes and commentaries, and the human authors are regarded as only the instruments or secretaries of the Spirit. The scholarly literature on Calvin still puzzles over the question how he can nevertheless - as he plainly does - admit that there are errors in the Bible. But more important for my present purpose is the fact that reverence for Scripture did not prevent Calvin from seeking a word *within* the words, nor from identifying *this* word as the actual object of faith.⁷

Bouwsma comments that it did not disturb Calvin 'that the biblical narrative contains inaccuracies and instances of carelessness on the part of its human authors. "It is well known," he observed, "that the Evangelists were not sufficiently careful with their time sequencies, nor even bothered about the details of what was done or said". To Calvin the notion of verbal inerrancy would have suggested wilful blindness'.⁸

Here Bouwsma cites Calvin on Luke 8:19 and Bouwsma gives his own 'free' translation. William Pringle's careful translation (1845) from the original Latin and collated with Calvin's French version, reads, 'But we know that the Evangelists were not very exact as to the order of dates, or even in detailing minutely everything that Christ did or said, so that the difficulty is soon removed' - and the difficulty is 'an apparent discrepancy here between Luke and the other two Evangelists'. Calvin is at pains at this point to stress the harmony of Scripture and concludes this section in a somewhat wider context -

Matthew relates that the message respecting their arrival [of his mother and brethren] was brought by one individual: Mark and Luke say that he was informed by many persons. But there is no inconsistency here; for the message which his mother sent to call him would be communicated, as usually happens, from one hand to another, till at length it reached him.⁹

A careful reading of Calvin's words will show that in fact he is not accusing the Evangelists of 'carelessness' - far from it.

Francois Wendel in his valuable work on Calvin states that the Reformer 'never affirmed literal inspiration'.

Although it is true to say that he thought one could find the word of God in the Bible, he nevertheless said that the word we possess in the Scriptures is a mirror which reflects something, but does not impart to us the thing itself ... Though the content of the Scripture is divine, inasmuch as it is the word of God, the form in which the content is clothed is not therefore divine. The authors of the books of the Bible wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; they were none the less liable to introduce human errors into it upon points of detail which do not affect the doctrine.¹⁰

In support of this contention, Wendel, (and others following him) cites Calvin's comments on Matthew 27:9 and Hebrews 11:21. In the first passage a statement from Zechariah 11:13 is attributed to Jeremiah, and Calvin comments

How the name of Jeremiah crept in, I confess that I do not know, nor do I give myself much trouble to inquire. The passage plainly shows that the name of *Jeremiah* has been put down by mistake, instead of Zechariah ...¹¹

In Hebrews 11:21 we read that Jacob worshipped 'leaning upon the top of his staff', but in Genesis 47:31 it is said that he did so upon the head *of his bed*. Calvin comments -

This is one of those places from which we may conclude that the points were not formerly used by the Hebrews; for the Greek translators could not have made such a mistake as to put staff here for a bed, if the mode of writing was then the same as now. No doubt Moses spoke of the head of his couch, when he said, *ol rash emethe*; but the Greek translators rendered the words, 'On the top of his staff', as though the last word was written mathaeh. The Apostle hesitated not to apply to his purpose what was commonly received: he was indeed writing to the Jews, but they who were dispersed into various countries, had changed their own language for the Greek. And we know that the Apostles were not so scrupulous in this respect, as not to accommodate themselves to the unlearned, who had as yet need of milk; and in this there is no danger, provided readers are ever brought back to the pure and original text of Scripture. But, in reality, the difference is but little; for the main thing was, that Jacob worshipped ...¹²

II Where Calvin Stood

Calvin, while holding to the inerrancy of the original autographs, made full allowance for copyists' errors, and these are largely the 'errors' which Calvin is said to have found in the Bible! Conservative scholarship has always allowed for scribal errors, which in no way detract from the verbal inspiration of the original manuscripts. And although we do not possess those manuscripts, the astounding thing, when we examine the earliest extant copies, is the immense care that the copyists took, so that scribal errors do not affect anything of significance. As the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it, Scripture 'being immediately inspired of God' has 'by His singular care and providence' been 'kept pure in all ages ...' (1:viii). Professor John H. Skilton writes -

That God has preserved the Scriptures in such a condition of essential purity as we would expect is manifestly the case. The Hebrew text of the Old Testament has survived the millenniums in a substantially and remarkably pure form. Among the extant manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible there is an extraordinary agreement. Kennicott in his edition of the Hebrew Bible with variant readings deals with consonantal variants in more than six hundred manuscripts. Dr. Robert Dick Wilson has pointed out that there are about 284,000,000 letters in the manuscripts considered by Kennicott and that among these letters there are about 900,000 variants, 750,000 of which are the quite trivial variation of *w* and *y*. There is, Dr. Wilson remarks, only about one variant for 316 letters and apart from the insignificant *w* and *y* variation only about one variant for 1580 letters ... Dr. Wilson has elsewhere said that there are hardly any variant readings in the manuscripts of the Old Testament in Hebrew with support of more than one out of 200 to 400 manuscripts

in which each book is found, except in the full and defective writing of the vowels, a matter which has no bearing on either the pronunciation or the meaning of the text ... The agreement which exists among our extant manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament is a sign of the extraordinary care exercised in the transmission of the text by the Jews.¹³

Dr. Skilton shows that the text of the New Testament has, like that of the Old, been preserved in a remarkably pure form, and he quotes Frederic Kenyon: 'The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries'.¹⁴

The facts concerning variant readings, noted above, are as well known to liberal scholars as to conservatives. And it does not require any great acumen to see that Calvin was well aware of the existence of copyists' errors and to understand some of his comments accordingly. Yet liberal scholars are so persistent in stating that Calvin saw errors of fact in the Bible that it is difficult not to feel that they have an axe to grind.

John H. Leith acknowledges that Calvin was convinced that the Bible is the word of God, and continues -

The discrepancies which he notes appear to be rather incidental and limited to matters of history, chronology, and style. So far as I know, Calvin never wavered from the conviction that all passages involving ethical and religious teachings were the word of God. He never, to my knowledge, sought to avoid the difficulties which some passages raised on the basis of their lack of inspiration. Yet Warfield seems to go too far in his assertion that Calvin admitted no errors in the Scriptures. He is well aware of instances in which Calvin points out chronological discrepancies in the Gospels, but he adds that this is no error, since Calvin knew that the writer never intended to give the chronological facts anyway.¹⁵

This is less than fair to Warfield who wrote in the section to which Leith refers

It is true that men have sought to discover in Calvin, particularly in his 'Harmony of the Gospels', acknowledgements of the presence of human errors in the fabric of Scripture. But these attempts rest on very crass misapprehensions of Calvin's efforts precisely to show that there are no such errors in the fabric of Scripture. When he explains, for example, that the purpose 'of the Evangelists' - or 'of the Holy Spirit', for he significantly uses these designations as synonyms - was not to write a chronologically exact record, but to present the general essence of things, this is not to allow that the Scriptures err humanly in their record of the sequence of time, but to assert that they intend to give no sequences of time and therefore cannot err in this regard. When again he suggests that an 'error' has found its way

into the text of Matthew xxvii.9 or possibly into Matthew xxiii.35, he is not speaking of the original, but of transmitted text ... In point of fact, Calvin not only asserts the freedom of Scripture as given by God from all error, but never in his detailed dealing with Scripture allows that such errors exist in it.¹⁶

There Warfield, as is his wont, writes cogently and convincingly and cannot be dismissed in cavalier fashion. It is important at this stage to remember that as William Henry Green put it,

One inspired writer in adopting the language of another did not feel bound to repeat it verbatim, but in the confidence of his equal inspiration modified the form at pleasure to suit his immediate purpose.¹⁷

Some theologians acknowledge that for Calvin the Scriptures were 'errorless in their original form', to quote Edward A. Dowey, who adds somewhat patronizingly -

To Calvin the theologian an error in Scripture is unthinkable. Hence the endless harmonizing, the explaining and interpreting of passages that seem to contradict or to be inaccurate. But Calvin the critical scholar recognizes mistakes with a disarming ingenuousness. The mistake or the gloss is simply a blunder made by an ignorant copyist.¹⁸

One wonders why some scholars are apparently reluctant to recognize Calvin's integrity and competence as an exegete.

There are those who say that Calvin held the view that the Scriptures were dictated by God in a mechanical fashion, and Calvin does use the term 'dictation' in this connection. But it is clear from a reading of his commentaries and sermons that, while he recognized dictation in some parts of Scripture his overall view made full allowance for differences in style, vocabulary etc. When, therefore, he uses the term 'dictation' it should be remembered that, as Warfield points out 'what Calvin has in mind is not to insist that the mode of inspiration was dictation, but that the result of inspiration is as if it were by dictation'.¹⁹ In other words Calvin saw the Scriptures as the pure Word of God.

Frequently we find verbal inerrancy confused with a crass literalism and some Calvin scholars would exonerate the Reformer from 'biblical literalism', as if any theologian worthy of the name has ever insisted that all Scripture be taken literally. R.A. Finlayson comments -

The linking of inerrancy with 'bare literalism' is another allegation that conservative theologians disown. Reverence for the text of Scripture as inspired does not mean that evangelicals are bound to a literal interpretation of it. The science of

hermeneutics developed freely within the premises of verbal inspiration, and principles of interpretation - whether literal, allegorical, or typological - were determined on grounds proper to the mode of revelation in each case.²⁰

By most liberals it is said that Calvin distinguished between the Scriptures and the Word conveyed by the Scripture. This is particularly the case where the writer holds to a Barthian or existentialist position. John H. Leith appeals to Calvin's *Geneva Catechism* in support of his contention that 'Calvin does not say that the Bible is the word of God. Rather, he says that the word of God can be found in the Holy Scriptures, which contain it'. Referring to God's 'holy word' that Catechism asks 'Where are we to seek for this word?' and answers, 'In the Holy Scriptures, in which it is contained'.²¹ So also the Westminster Divines stated that the 'Word of God' is 'contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments'. It never occurred to the Reformers, or to those who prepared the historic confession of the church, that such language meant that some parts of the Bible were the Word of God and some parts were not. Nor did they mean to say that the Bible 'conveyed' the Word of God. In the light of their writings as a whole, they firmly and clearly believed that it is the Word of God.

Some contemporary writers still see in Calvin a distinction between the words of the Bible and the Word of God which it reflects or conveys. Alister E. McGrath puts it quite subtly when he says that Calvin

does not develop a mechanical or literal understanding of the inspiration of Scripture ... The content of Scripture is indeed divine - yet the form in which that content is embodied is human. Scripture is the *verbum Dei*, not the *verba Dei*. It is the record of the word, not the Word itself.²²

There we have a Barthianized Calvin - Scripture no longer seen as the very Word of God, but the *vehicle* by which the Word comes to man. It is a groundless assumption that the human aspect of the Bible, which Calvin fully recognized, inevitably results in errors - usually regarded as historical and scientific. Were the Bible *merely* human this could be the case. When Calvin says that there is nothing human in the Bible, he is thinking in terms of authorship, seeing Scripture *in its totality* as 'God-breathed': in that sense there is nothing human in Scripture. And it needs to be emphasized that while the Bible is not just a history book, nor a scientific text-book, there are, in this respect, *no proven errors* in it.

III Calvin's View of Word and Spirit

Those who insist that Calvin did not hold to biblical inerrancy, point to his many statements where he sees a vital connection between Word and Spirit. Calvin makes it clear that 'the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit?'²³ Again he writes -

... we need not wonder if there are many who doubt as to the Author of Scripture; for, although the majesty of God is displayed in it, yet none but those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit have eyes to perceive what ought, indeed, to have been visible to all, and yet is visible to the elect alone.²⁴

Calvin sees the Spirit working through the instrumentality of the Word and confirming that Word to the people of God.

By a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit who causes us to contemplate God's face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize him in his own image, namely, in the Word.²⁵

This connection between Word and Spirit in no way conflicts with the truth that in the Bible we have divinely inscripturated revelation. There are those who insist that the Spirit is not to be identified with the Word, which in one sense is true, and who say that to hold to a verbally inspired Word is to detract from Christ who is the Word incarnate. Thus Wilhelm Niesel writes:

The task of the Spirit is to make us sensitive to the one Word which lies concealed in the words of Scripture; it (!) must therefore use the written words and quicken them for our understanding. In order to bring the incarnate Word near to us the Spirit needs the written word ... Calvin's opinions about the relation of Word and Spirit are governed by the insight that the one theme of Holy Scripture is the incarnate Word itself(!)²⁶

It is a fallacy to suggest that belief in biblical inerrancy detracts from the position of Christ the incarnate Word. Of course 'The Word of God the incarnate Logos must be distinguished from the words of Scripture', as Niesel affirms, but it does not follow, as Niesel suggests, that what he terms 'a literal theory of inspiration' in any way conflicts with that distinction.²⁷ As John Murray comments, in answer to Niesel, '... we find in Calvin himself no sense of incongruity between Scripture as being itself the truth of God and Christ as truth incarnate, nor even between an inerrant Scripture and Christ as the focal point of revelation'. And later he asks, '... why should we look for any sense of

incongruity?’²⁸ Indeed there is obvious incongruity in the belief that a defective Bible can be a reliable witness to the Word incarnate. And the existentialism that sees the Word of God in terms of momentary flashes of insight as the Bible is read - these existential moments varying from person to person and from time to time - really robs the Bible of all normative value for the individual and the church alike. This shift to subjectivism began with the German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) who reacted to the philosophical scepticism of his day by making human experience crucial in determining belief, and as R.A. Finlayson says, ‘Schleiermacher, in his attempt to rehabilitate religion by placing it on the basis of religious consciousness adopted the method of inquiring, not what God said from without, but what the Christian consciousness said from within’.²⁹ Schleiermacher has been called the father of modern theology. He certainly opened a door through which many have passed, including the brilliant and eccentric Danish theologian, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). It was Kierkegaard who developed what became known as ‘existentialism’. He saw knowledge of the truth coming as a dramatic moment of enlightenment - like a flash of lightning in the darkness. Thus rational philosophy and theology were spurned and the way was open for what is now termed postmodernism.

The obvious assumption of those who reject the concept of biblical inerrancy, and who would make Calvin do likewise, that this results in propositional, unchanging theology which is seen as lifeless and static, is seen to be unjustified when the connection between Word and Spirit is considered. In Scripture we have the living Word of God and by that Word the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts.³⁰ Because the truth is constant, it does not follow that it is static: God’s Word is dynamic.

Summary and Conclusion

1. Calvin has not given us a detailed discussion of the mode of inspiration. Biblical inerrancy was not an issue in his day.
2. His comments on 2 Timothy 3:16 are typical of his comments on similar passages. ‘This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him, first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are

not a doctrine delivered by the will and pleasure of men, but dictated (*dictatam*) by the Holy Spirit... we owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it'.³¹

3. Calvin made full allowance for copyist's errors in the transmitted text of Scripture and shows that he is conscious of the comparative insignificance of such errors. However, when confronted by apparent contradictions in the Bible - and they do exist - Calvin almost always offered a solution. Clearly he believed in the harmony of Scripture.
4. We do not necessarily accept all Calvin's solutions in dealing with passages like Acts 7:14 or Hebrews 11:21.
5. Calvin was fully aware that the writers of Scripture were not bound to follow a strict time sequence, or always to quote from the Old Testament with exact precision. John Murray writes, 'It must be emphatically stated that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy for which the church has contended throughout history and, for which a great many of us still contend, is not based on the assumption that the criterion of meticulous precision in every detail of record or history is the indispensable canon of biblical infallibility. To erect such a canon is utterly artificial and arbitrary and is not one by which the inerrancy of Scripture is to be judged. It is easy for the opponents of inerrancy to set up such artificial criteria and then expose the Bible as full of errors. We shall have none of that, and neither will Calvin. The Bible is literature and the Holy Spirit was pleased to employ the literary forms of the original human writers in the milieu in which they wrote'.³² What needs to be stressed is that while the writers of Scripture did so freely, using their own vocabulary and style, the Holy Spirit so 'moved' them ('borne along like a ship in the wind', the idea in 2 Peter 1:21) that they wrote precisely what God intended them to write and were safeguarded from the errors common to all other writers.
6. Calvin recognized that it was divine authorship that invested Scripture with authority, and not the internal testimony of the Spirit which confirms the Word to the believer.
7. Calvin did recognize that by the operation of the Spirit the Scriptures are self-authenticating.³³

8. Clearly Calvin saw Scripture in and of itself - quite apart from human experience - as the Word of God, and not as a vehicle that transmits the Word.

The words of Professor John Murray are pertinent:

In Calvin we have a mass of perspicuous statement and of lengthened argument to the effect that Scripture is impregnable and inviolable, and it would be the resort of desperation to take a few random comments, wrench them from the total effect of Calvin's teaching, and build upon them a thesis which would run counter to his own repeated assertions respecting the inviolable character of Scripture as the oracles of God and as having nothing human mixed with it.³⁴

Calvin, to quote Richard Muller, is being pressed 'deeper and deeper into a labyrinth of twentieth-century [and twenty-first!] theologizing', and studied by means of 'contemporary theological grids'³⁵ resulting in a Barthian, Schleiermacherian, existentialist Calvin. The permutations by which Calvin has been viewed are many: Calvin the humanist, Calvin the scholastic, Calvin the rhetorician, Calvin the feminist³⁶ - not to mention 'the two Calvins' of Edward Dowey, theologian and humanist, who come close to quarrelling! or the psycho-analyzed Calvin of William Bouwsma.³⁷ Thus Calvin himself has become that 'nose of wax' turned at will to satisfy contemporary philosophy. The advice of Professor Richard Muller is timely: 'A clever theologian can accommodate Calvin to nearly any agenda: a faithful theologian - and a good historian - will seek to listen to Calvin, not to use him'.³⁸

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9. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Harmony of The Evangelists* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957), vol.2, p.89f.
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11. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957), vol.3, p.272. On this point Leon Morris comments, 'The explanation may be that Matthew was making a composite quotation [some of the words seem to be derived from Jeremiah 18:23] and considered the parts that came from Jeremiah significant enough for him to cite that prophet as his authority. He is including words from Zechariah, but he is pointing his readers to Jeremiah. Another view starts from the fact that Jeremiah came first in rabbinical lists of prophets and, as Lightfoot puts it, "when ... Matthew produced a text of Zechariah under the name of Jeremy, he only cites the words of the volume of the prophets under his name who stood first in the volume of the prophets"' (*The Gospel according to Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman, 1992), p.696f.
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31. John Calvin, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p.248f. See Calvin's comments on 2 Peter 1:20.
32. Op. cit., p.30.
33. *Institutes*, 1.7.1.
34. Op,cit., p.31.
35. Op.cit., pp.vii, 188.
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THE SECRET OF SANCTIFICATION: UNION WITH CHRIST

Walter Marshall's Gospel Mystery of Sanctification

by Joel R. Beeke

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The primary secret of sanctification is a personal and vital union with Jesus Christ. In this article, we will look at that subject through the writing of Walter Marshall. First, we shall look at who Marshall was, then at the context and some of the content of his famous book *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*. Finally, we shall suggest several practical lessons we can learn from Marshall.

Who was Walter Marshall?

Walter Marshall was born at Bishops Wearmouth in Durham, England, in 1628. At age eleven, he went to study at Winchester College, after which he became a Fellow at New College, Oxford. In 1654 he was approved for the living of Fawley; in 1656 he was appointed to the vicarage of Hursley in Hampshire. He married and had two daughters. From 1657 to 1661 he also served as a fellow at Winchester College.

When the Act of Uniformity was adopted by the government in 1662, all ministers of the Church of England were asked to give proof of Episcopal ordination and of conformity to the *Book of Common Prayer*. Like hundreds of his Puritan colleagues, Marshall decided as a matter of conscience not to conform. He and those ministers were ejected from their parishes on St. Bartholomew's Day, August 24, 1662, which would thereafter be called Black Bartholomew's Day. In the preface to Marshall's work on sanctification, a friend wrote of the effect of that day: 'He [Marshall] was put under the Bartholomew Bushel with near two thousand more lights whose illumination made the land a Goshen.'

Soon after this, Marshall was installed as minister of an independent congregation at Gosport in Hampshire, where he served the last eighteen years of his life. At Gosport he wrote his book on sanctification, titling it *Gospel Mystery* from Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 3:16: 'Great is the mystery of godliness.'

During this time, Marshall also experienced profound spiritual distress. For years he sought after holiness and peace. He read Richard Baxter extensively, then questioned Baxter, who said that Marshall had taken him too legalistically. He went to Thomas Goodwin next, telling him about the sins that weighed heavily on his conscience. Goodwin's response was that Marshall had forgotten to mention the greatest sin of all, of not believing on the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of his sins and the sanctifying of his nature.

Marshall began to focus more on studying and preaching Christ. He realized that he had been trying to make his own righteousness the basis of his dealings with God as well as the ground of his peace. Consequently he had not submitted himself to the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. When he focused upon Christ, he found holiness, peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost. *Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* was the fruit of such experience. In this book he gave to posterity the lessons he had learned over many years about how to find and enjoy union with Christ.

Marshall's preaching was edifying though he was not known for his preaching. He ministered over a fairly wide area; there are records of his preaching in Winchester, Alton, Winton, Taunton, and Crewekerne.

Marshall died at Gosport in 1680. Before he died, he said to his visitors, 'I die in the full persuasion of the truth, and in the comfort of that doctrine which I have preached to you.' He then offered his last words, 'The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Rom. 6:23). The funeral sermon was preached by Samuel Tomlyns. In the preface to that sermon, Tomlyns said of his friend, 'He wooed for Christ in his preaching, and allured you to Christ by his walking.'

Marshall's book was not printed until twelve years after his death. It has been reprinted often over the centuries and praised by many, including Adam Gib, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Chalmers, Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine. Robert Traill wrote of the work: 'Mr. Marshall's treatise on the *Mystery of Sanctification* by faith in Jesus Christ is such a vindication and confirmation of that Protestant doctrine, that I fear no effectual opposition against it.' William Cowper wrote, 'Marshall is an old acquaintance of mine: I have both read him and heard him read with pleasure and edification. The doctrines he maintains are, under the influence of the divine Spirit, the very life of my soul, and the soul of all my happiness.'

James Hervey was even more enthusiastic. 'Were I to be banished on to some desolate island possessed of only two books beside my Bible, this should be one of the two, perhaps the first that I would choose,' he wrote.

The Context of Marshall's Book

To understand why Marshall wrote as he did, we need to know the context in which he wrote. He repeatedly argued against antinomianism as well as neonomianism, particularly the neominian teaching of Richard Baxter. It's hard at times to know for sure whose teaching Marshall was opposing, however, because he never directly named those whose errors he was repudiating.

Antinomianism derives from *anti*, which means 'against,' and *nomos*, which means 'law.' An antinomian is thus someone who says that it is not essential for Christians to use the law as a rule of conduct for daily life. Antinomians believe that Christians are not bound to obey the law because they think that all Old Testament law was abolished in the New Testament.

The term *antinomian* was coined by Luther in his struggle with a former student, Johann Agricola. Agricola believed that repentance should not be prompted by the law but by the preaching of the gospel through faith in Christ. This struggle, along with a controversy surrounding Anne Hutchinson in New England Puritanism, were the most famous antinomian controversies of church history. Anne Hutchinson, who claimed to have special revelations from God, said that most of the Puritan pastors in New England were under the law even though Christians were supposed to be free from the law.

In refuting antinomianism, Marshall was in good company. Many seventeenth-century divines, including Samuel Rutherford, wrote against antinomianism. No one reacted to antinomianism as strongly as Richard Baxter, however. Baxter taught that antinomianism was rooted in gross ignorance and led to gross wickedness. James I. Packer writes of Baxter's opposition, 'Baxter had no doubt that the impulse and the theology behind the Antinomian quest for 'comfort' at all costs came from the pit, for its outcome in practice was this; men went to the Antinomians troubled about their sins and all the advice they received was to be troubled about them no longer for Christ had taken them away. Where the Puritan had said, Put sin out of your life, the Antinomian said, Put it out of your mind. Look at the law, consider your guilt, learn to hate sin and fear it and let it go, said the Puritan. Look away from the law and forget your sins and guilt, look away from yourself and stop worrying, said the Antinomian.'

Though right in refuting antinomianism, Baxter went too far and developed, with Daniel Williams, what has become known as neonomianism. Neonomians said that the gospel is a ‘new law’ (*neonomos*) that replaces the Old Testament law. The new law of the gospel is that a sinner must obey the gospel by faith, and that this faith, together with the righteousness of Christ, is the ground of justification. Baxter used neonomianism to propagate his peculiar views on the atonement and justification.

Marshall gracefully attacked both antinomianism and neonomianism. In some ways he agreed with Baxter more than the antinomians, while in other ways he agreed more with people such as Tobias Crisp, who had mild antinomian sympathies.

The Content of Marshall’s Book

Marshall divided his work into fourteen sections that he called *directions*. Briefly, here’s what those directions said.

Direction #1: *‘That we may acceptably perform the Duties of Holiness and Righteousness required in the Law, our first work is to learn the powerful and effectual Means by which we may attain to so great an End.’*

Marshall introduced his work by explaining that ‘holiness consists not only in external works of piety and charity, but in the holy thoughts, imaginations and affections of the soul, and chiefly in love; from whence all other works must flow or else they are not acceptable to God.’

Against the antinomians, Marshall went on to state that we must keep the law. To do that, we must learn how and what will help us, Marshall said. That need is especially urgent because of our radical inability to keep the law due to original sin, and because of our position before God as law breakers. Marshall therefore argued that ‘sanctification, whereby our hearts and lives are confirmed to the law, is a grace of God communicated to us by means.’ That means is Holy Scripture. We must sit at Christ’s feet, to learn from him the way of holiness, Marshall said.

Direction #2: *‘Several Endowments and Qualifications are necessary to enable us for the immediate Practice of the Law.’*

Four of those qualifications are: 1. We need ‘an inclination and propensity of heart to the duties of the law’ in order to practice the law. In opposition

to those who teach universal redemption and ascribe free will to man, Marshall said that that inclination can only be granted to us by God giving us a new heart.

2. 'We must be well-persuaded of our reconciliation with God. Herein I include the great benefit of justification as the means whereby we are reconciled to God,' Marshall said. He added that some people (probably Baxter and his followers) believed that the only way to establish sincere obedience was to make it a requirement for justification and reconciliation with God. Marshall disagreed. 'Consult your own experience, if you have any true love to God, whether it were not wrought in you by a sense of God's love first to you,' he wrote. If our works are not motivated by God's love to us and do not flow out of reconciliation with him, then we are still at enmity with him. And if we are at enmity with him, how can our works be done out of obedience? All good works therefore demand that our conscience first be purged from dead works, and that can only be done by God revealing to us that all our sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ's blood.

3. We must be 'persuaded of our future enjoyment of the everlasting heavenly happiness,' Marshall said. This persuasion, he added, will allure us, dispose us, and encourage us to sincere obedience. If Christ, the great pattern of holiness, was encouraged to obey for the joy that was set before him (Heb. 12:2), shouldn't the Christian be similarly motivated? Marshall concluded that such motivation produces neither licentiousness (as neonomians fear), nor legalism (as antinomians fear).

4. We must be 'persuaded of sufficient strength both to will and perform our duty acceptably, until we come to the enjoyment of the heavenly happiness,' Marshall wrote. Such persuasion consists of trusting in God's strength and wisdom. God encourages His people to find that strength, which then encourages them to pursue what Marshall called the wonderful enterprise of holiness.

Direction #3: 'The way to get holy Endowments and Qualifications necessary to frame and enable us for the immediate Practice of the Law, is to receive them out of the Fullness of Christ, by fellowship with him; and that we may have this Fellowship, we must be in Christ, and have Christ himself in us, by a mystical Union with him.'

Marshall explained that just as we are justified by Christ's righteousness worked out by him and imputed to us, so we are sanctified by holiness accomplished in Christ, then imparted to us. As our corruption was produced in the first Adam, then passed on to us, so our holiness is first produced in Christ, then

passed on to us. We don't actually work with Christ in producing holiness, but we receive holiness from Christ. We put holiness into practice by using what we already received from Christ.

Many people go through great agony trying to mortify their sins in order to become Christians. Martin Luther was a notable example. They do not realize that sanctification, like justification, results from union with Christ. It is impossible to become a Christian by works, Marshall said. The only way to be holy is to receive a new nature out of the fullness of Christ, then practice holiness out of Christ's holiness.

This union between Christ and the believer is one of three mystical unions presented in Scripture. The other two are the union of three Persons in one Godhead, and the union of the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ. Scripture speaks most of the union between Christ and the believer, Marshall said. For example, Scripture says Christ dwells in believers and they in him (John 6:56, 14:20). They are joined together so as to become one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). Believers are members of Christ's body, of his flesh and bones. The two, Christ and the church, are one flesh (Eph. 5:30-31).

Scripture likens this union to many others: to the union between *God the Father* and *Christ* (John 14:20, 17:21-23); the union between the *vine* and its *branches* (John 15:4-5); the union between the *head* and *body* (Eph. 1:22-23); and the union between *bread* and the *eater* (John 6:51-53-54). Furthermore, that union is signified and sealed in the Lord's Supper.

Marshall warns against misunderstanding this mystical union, however, by stating that a believer is not made God but only the temple of God. Furthermore the believer would not become perfect in holiness, nor would Christ be made a sinner. As Marshall wrote, 'Christ knoweth how to dwell in believers by certain measures or degrees, and to make them holy so far only as he dwelleth in them.'

Marshall went on to say that the believer's union with Christ was the goal of Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection. Consequently, Christ's sacrifice was 'the cause of all the holiness that ever was, or shall be given to man, from the fall of Adam, to the end of the world.'

The believer discovers this union through the work of the Holy Spirit. 'Our sanctification is by the Holy Ghost, by whom we live and walk holily,' Marshall wrote. 'Now, the Holy Ghost first rested on Christ in all fullness, that he might be communicated from him to us And, when he sanctifieth us, he baptizes us

into Christ, and joins us to Christ by himself, as the great bond of union (1 Cor. 12:13).’

Direction #4: *‘The Means or Instruments whereby the Spirit of God accomplishes our Union with Christ, and our Fellowship with him in all holiness, are the Gospel, whereby Christ enters into our hearts to work faith in us; and faith, whereby we actually receive Christ himself, with all his fullness, into our hearts. And this faith is a grace of the Spirit, whereby we heartily believe the gospel, and also believe on Christ, as he is revealed and freely promised to us therein, for all his salvation.’*

Faith not only assents to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, but also receives Christ and his salvation as offered freely in the gospel, Marshall explained. Both actions must be performed from the heart ‘with an unfeigned love to the truth, and a desire of Christ and his salvation above all things.’

Marshall argued against those who consider this a dangerous doctrine and seek to correct it by teaching that in addition to justification, sanctification is also necessary to salvation. ‘Though we be justified by faith; yet we are sanctified by our own performance of the law; and so they set up salvation by works,’ Marshall said. He also argued against those who teach that faith is not the principal saving act of the soul.

Marshall then very carefully stated how faith is related to salvation. Faith is not a work of merit but a gift of grace, he said. Faith itself doesn’t save, only faith in Christ. Faith is a self-emptying grace that is devoid of human strength and human works. Faith finds all its confidence in Christ. We don’t have faith in our faith; rather, faith is the means, by which we receive, and put on Christ. Faith rests on Christ as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Marshall wrote, ‘When saving faith is wrought in us, the same Spirit giveth us fast hold of Christ by it. As he openeth the mouth of faith to receive Christ, so he filleth it with Christ.’

Finally, Marshall proved from Scripture that faith leads to holiness, not licentiousness. Faith prompts love, praise, prayer, patience, communion with the saints, Christlikeness, and self-denial, he said. He then concluded, ‘Thus we are first passive, and then active, in this great work of mystical union: we are first apprehended of Christ, and then we apprehend Christ. Christ entereth first into the soul to join himself to it, by giving it the spirit of faith; and so the soul receiveth Christ and his Spirit by their own power.’

Direction #5: *'We cannot attain to the Practice of true holiness, by any of our endeavours, while we continue in our natural state, and are not partakers of a new state, by union and fellowship with Christ through faith.'*

The person who seeks to reform his life according to the law without considering that his state before God must first be changed commits a grievous error. As Marshall wrote, 'We have no ground to trust on Christ to help us to will or to do that which is acceptable to him while we continue in our natural state; or to imagine that freedom of will to holiness is restored to us by the merits of his death.' It is worth noting that Arminians teach that Christ's death has restored the freedom of the will for all men.

Direction #6: *'Those that endeavour to perform sincere obedience to all the commands of Christ, as the condition whereby they are to procure for themselves a right and title to salvation, and a good ground to trust on him for the same, do seek their salvation by the works of the law, and not by the Faith of Christ, as he is revealed in the gospel: and they shall never be able to perform any true holy obedience by all such endeavours.'*

Baxter's neonomianism, which requires sincere though imperfect obedience, is another expression of the old Galatian heresy, Marshall said. 'The difference between the law and the gospel does not at all consist in this, that the one consists in *perfect* doing; the other, only in *sincere* doing: but [the difference lies] in this, that the [law] requires *doing*, [whereas the gospel requires] *not* doing, but *believing* for life and salvation,' Marshall wrote. 'The terms [of law and gospel] are different not only in degree, but in their whole nature.'

Furthermore, those who try to win salvation by sincere obedience act contrary to Christ Himself, to free grace, to faith, and to the personal experience of God's people, Marshall said. The effect of such efforts only stirs up the corruption of the human heart and makes sinners hate God and rebel against him, then forces them to sink into unutterable despair. 'Therefore the doctrine of salvation by sincere obedience, that was invented against Antinomianism, may well be ranked among the worst Antinomian errors,' Marshall concluded. 'For my part, I hate it with perfect hatred, and account it mine enemy, as I have found it to be.'

Direction #7: *'We are not to imagine that our Hearts and Lives must be changed from Sin to Holiness in any measure, before we may safely venture to trust on Christ for the sure enjoyment of himself, and his Salvation.'*

Here Marshall addressed the issue of what comes prior to faith. He argued that what people think of as preparation for faith is either faith itself or the result of faith. To try to make ourselves fit for Christ is to be led away from Christ by a satanic delusion, Marshall said.

People stumble when they try to say that certain conditions are necessary prerequisites to salvation, Marshall explained. Those conditions include the need for repentance prior to believing in Christ, the need for regeneration as something separable in time from faith, the need to receive Christ as Lord and lawgiver before receiving Him as Savior, the need for some good works before trusting in Christ for forgiveness of sins, and the need for more evidences of grace before laying hold on Christ for salvation. Such people become spiritually distressed when they think they must have more love for God, more godliness of heart, more thoughts of God's attributes, more victory over lusts, more cleansing of their hearts, more impressions of the wrath of God, more confession of sin, and more heart-felt prayer and praise before they may trust in Christ for their salvation. Such erroneous ideas only keep people away from Christ.

What people really need is union with Christ by faith, for all marks of grace are included in faith. Such marks do not precede faith; they accompany and follow faith. Marshall concluded, 'While we endeavour to prepare our way to Christ by holy qualifications, we do rather fill it with stumblingblocks, and deep pits, whereby our souls are hindered from ever attaining to salvation of Christ.'

Direction #8: 'Be sure to seek for Holiness of Heart and Life only in its due order, where God has placed it, after Union with Christ, Justification, and the gift of the Holy Ghost; and, in that order, seek it earnestly by Faith, as a very necessary part of your salvation.'

After emphasizing the importance of getting faith and holiness in the right order, Marshall issued a stern warning against antinomianism. The best way to oppose antinomianism, he said, is 'not to deny as some do that trusting on Christ for salvation is a saving act of faith, but rather to show that none do or can trust on Christ for true salvation, except they trust on him for holiness; neither do they heartily desire true salvation if they do not desire to be made truly righteous in their hearts and lives.'

Direction #9: 'We must first receive the Comforts of the Gospel, that we may be able to perform sincerely the Duties of the Law.'

By nature we are addicted to a legal approach to salvation, Marshall said. We don't expect a paycheck before working, so we also don't expect comfort before doing our duty. But God comforts his people before they win his favor. That is the only way they can come to salvation. As Marshall wrote, 'Can the glad tidings of the gospel of peace be believed and Christ and his Spirit actually received into the heart, without any relief to the soul from oppressing fear, grief, and despair?'

Direction #10: *'That we may be prepared by the Comforts of the Gospel to perform sincerely the Duties of the Law, we must get some Assurance of Salvation, in that very Faith whereby Christ himself is received into our Hearts: therefore we must endeavor to believe on Christ confidently, persuading and assuring ourselves, in the Act of believing, that God freely giveth to us an Interest in Christ and his Salvation, according to his gracious promise.'*

Assurance of salvation is necessary for growth in holiness, Marshall said. The early Reformers, taught that faith was a persuasion or confidence of our salvation by Christ; and that we must be sure to apply Christ and his salvation to ourselves in believing. 'This doctrine was one of the great engines whereby they prevailed to overthrow the Popish superstition, whereof doubtfulness of salvation is one of the principle pillars,' Marshall wrote.

Marshall then discussed the direct and reflex actions of faith, arguing that those two acts of faith represent two kinds of assurance. The direct act of faith assures a sinner that he can get into a state of grace. It says yes to the question: Can God bestow salvation upon me immediately even if I have been very sinful? That kind of assurance accompanies saving faith, Marshall said. That's the kind of assurance that the early Reformers were talking about when they defined saving faith in terms of assurance.

The reflex act of faith, which the Puritans focused on, answers a different concern. It says yes to the question: Am I truly saved? Many of God's people lack this kind of assurance, Marshall said. They are not sure how they will fare on the Day of Judgment.

According to Marshall, believers who have the direct act of faith without the reflex act of faith still have a measure of assurance. Marshall said this because he was concerned that some of his colleagues were treating the reflex act of faith as if it were the only kind of assurance that existed. Marshall feared that they were discouraging many precious saints by ignoring the assuring element in the

direct act of faith as well as by demanding more marks of grace than the ordinary Christian discovers in the reflex act of faith.

Marshall also held that many of his contemporaries mistakenly thought that assurance of salvation could not be accompanied by doubt. We are creatures of flesh, Marshall wrote. As such, even believers who have the highest degree of assurance must continue to wage war against the corruption of unbelief and doubts, as the weakness of the flesh.

The direct act of faith is granted by the Holy Spirit to the ordinary Christian, Marshall wrote. Believers are sealed with the Spirit from the moment they savingly believe. Thus, the witness and seal of the Spirit are not reserved for only a few of God's people. Marshall concluded by saying: 'Therefore we may judge rather, that the Spirit worketh this in us by giving saving faith itself, by the direct act of which all true believers are enabled to trust assuredly on Christ for the enjoyment of the adoption of children, and all his salvation according to the free promise of God; and to call God Father without reflecting on any good qualifications in themselves, for the Spirit is received by the *direct* act of faith (Gal. 3:2); and so he is the Spirit of adoption, and comfort, to all that receive him.'

Direction #11: '*Endeavour diligently to perform the great Work of believing on Christ, in a right Manner, without any Delay; and then also continue and increase in your most holy Faith; that so your Enjoyment of Christ, Union and Fellowship with him, and all Holiness by him, may be begun, continued, and increased in you.*'

The purpose of Scripture is to bring men to faith in Christ. Yet, faith is difficult because of our corruption and Satan's temptations, Marshall said. Consequently, the believer, must strive to believe on Christ in the right way. To believe on Christ rightly means to receive the truth of the gospel and to come to the Christ of the gospel. To come to Christ rightly means to receive him as a free gift with ardent affection, trusting in him alone for salvation. We must not delay, but come to Christ immediately, with full assurance of faith for a new heart and holy life.

Having pressed the urgency of faith, Marshall then stressed the importance of continuing and increasing in faith. The believer ought never think that he may grow careless because his name is written in heaven. Marshall particularly warned against trusting in faith as a work of righteousness instead of trusting in Christ alone by faith.

Direction #12: *'Make diligent use of your most holy Faith, for the immediate performance of the duties of the law, by walking no longer according to your old natural state, or any principles or means of practice that belong unto it; but only according to that new state, which you receive by Faith, and the principles and means of practice that properly belong thereunto; and strive to continue and increase in such manner of practice. This is the only way to attain to an acceptable performance of those holy and righteous duties, as far as it is possible in this present life.'*

Marshall said that believers should strive to obey the law by 'gospel principles and means.' He stressed the need for prayerful study of Scripture for a proper understanding of the way of holiness. He also stressed that though we receive a perfect Christ by faith, our enjoyment of him is imperfect.

Marshall explained how corruption dampens our enjoyment of spiritual blessings. He also warned against perfectionism, which looks like a friend of holiness but is really its enemy. Perfectionism motivates people to seek holiness by false principles and means, he said.

We must remember that the flesh is irremediable in this life. Death is its destiny. The only answer for the flesh is a new nature in Christ. But a new nature does not come through the law. Rather, it comes by faith in Christ, who is the fountain of holiness. 'Believers should not act for life, but *from* life,' Marshall wrote. Some people use the effects of God's attributes of power, knowledge, and justice, as well as the joy of heaven and the damnation of hell, as motives for holiness. But as Marshall taught, that way is doomed. Rather, we are to live upon Christ himself in all his excellencies and beauty, and out of the fullness of his provision for us.

Marshall concluded this section by reminding us that Christ will not overdrive his sheep. 'He will gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young (Is. 40:11),' Marshall said. 'So we are to beware of being too rigorous in exacting righteousness of ourselves and others beyond the measure of faith and grace.'

'Children that venture on their feet beyond their strength, have many a fall; and so have babes in Christ, when they venture unnecessarily upon such duties as are beyond the strength of their faith', he went on. 'We should be content, at present, to do the best we can, according to the measure of the gift of Christ, though we know that others are enabled to do much better.'

Direction #13: *'Endeavour diligently to make the right use of all means appointed in the word of God, for the obtaining and practicing Holiness only in this way of believing in Christ, and walking in him, according to your new state by faith.'*

In thirty pages of text, Marshall explained how we must use the means of grace in striving for holiness. We must endeavor diligently to know the Word of God, to examine our state and daily life by the Word, and to meditate regularly on the Word. We are to use the sacraments as spiritual feasts to promote the life of faith. We are to pray in such a way that we can live by faith in Christ, according to the new man. We must pray from the heart by faith in the name of Christ, looking to God as our Father, believing in the remission of our sins for Christ's sake, and using every sanctifying grace we can lay hold of to stir ourselves into a holy frame of mind. All of that must be accompanied by heartfelt singing of the Psalms, periodic fasting, and frequent fellowship with the saints. In all those means, however, we must take care that we use them but not abuse them by putting them in the place of Christ.

Direction #14: *'That you may seek Holiness and Righteousness, only by believing in Christ, and walking in him by faith, according to the former Directions, take encouragement from the great advantages of this way, and the excellent properties of it.'*

In other words, Marshall said that holiness grounded in union with Christ, along with the diligent use of the means of grace, will reap a fruitful and blessed life. Such a pursuit will abase our flesh, exalt God, and coalesce with all the doctrines of grace. This is the only pleasant and sure way to attain true holiness.

Lessons from Marshall for Today

There are at least five lessons that Marshall's book can teach us today:

1. The Inseparability of Union with Christ and Sanctification

We learn from Marshall that all sanctification, indeed, all spiritual life, is inseparable from spiritual union with Jesus Christ. Union with Christ is the foundation of our entire spiritual life.

Union with Christ became such an important doctrine to Paul that he mentioned it on nearly every page of his epistles. He uses such phrases as 'in Christ' and 'in the Lord' 164 times in his epistles - 16 times in Ephesians 1 alone. In

Ephesians 1 Paul tells us that union with Christ is a vast, all-embracing truth for his people — a truth that runs from eternity past to eternity future and spans all the time between.

Paul says that Christ manifested this unity in the accomplishment of redemption. He did not act as a private person, but as the representative of his people. He acted as their agent so that in the mind of God what he accomplished was reckoned to the account of the elect as if they themselves had done it. That is such an important concept to Paul that he coins new words to express it. He takes Greek verbs and adds to them a prefix that means ‘together with.’ He says in Galatians 2:20, ‘I am *crucified with* Christ’; in Romans 6:4, ‘Therefore *we are buried with* him’; in Ephesians 2:5-6, ‘Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath *quicken^ded us together with* Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath *raised us up together*, and *made us sit together* in heavenly places in Christ Jesus’; and in Romans 8:17 that we shall ‘be also *glorified together*’ with Christ.

Paul is saying that our union with Christ is so intimate that, in a sense, when he was crucified, we were crucified; when he died, we died; when he was buried, we were buried; when he was raised from the dead, we were raised; when he ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father, we were also glorified. Being in his body, believers are united with Christ on the throne today. Who can explain that? It is as a poet wrote:

*One in the tomb, one when He rose,
One when He triumphed o'er His foes,
One when in heaven He took His seat
While seraphs sang all hell's defeat,
With Him our Head we stand or fall,
Our Life, our Surety, our All.*

Union with Christ is all-embracing because it encompasses all divine blessing in Christ. In Ephesians 1:3 Paul declares how all-embracing this really is, ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with *all* spiritual blessings in heavenly places *in* Christ.’ Paul is not saying that all blessings are made available to us in such a way that Christ only parcels them out piecemeal, with a little wisdom here and a bit of strength there. Rather, Paul stresses that Christ gives us himself. He is our wisdom, *he* is our strength, *he* is our compassion, *he* is our sanctification. The secret of the Christian life is to more intimately know the Christ to whom the believer is bound forever. If we are true believers, we know that every spiritual blessing that he possesses he will

share with us because we are by grace in united with him. That's why it is important never to separate the benefits of Christ from his Person.

What Marshall basically wrote was this: As long as Christ remains outside of us, all that he has suffered for the salvation of sinners is meaningless to us. Conversely, everything that God wants to give his people is given to them in Christ. So only in Christ are we created anew and sanctified. 'We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.' Spiritual life from start to finish is grounded in union with Christ.

Apart from Christ, we cannot view our past, present, or future with anything but dread. But as faith enables us to see our union with Christ, we are assured that he who has begun the good work of sanctification within us will carry on to the end (Phil. 1:6). Our sanctification cannot be aborted because our union with Christ is unbreakable. If you are a believer, Christ is in you and you are in him forever.

In ancient days sailing vessels at times could not get close enough to shore to dock. So while the ship waited off shore the crew would place the ship's anchor in a small boat called a forerunner, bring it to shore, and tie up the small boat at the place where the sailing vessel was supposed to dock. When weather conditions permitted, the crew would pull in that anchor chain and slowly draw the ship into shore.

Jesus is our anchor. He is also our forerunner. He is in heaven, the safe haven. But we are connected to him by a bond that no storm can ever snap. One day his almighty hands will pull us to safety where he is.

The believer may be sure that the Father will respond to him just as the Father responds to his Son. Is Jesus acceptable in heaven? Then so is the believer. Is Jesus worthy to sit at the right hand of the Father? Then so is the believer.

Union with Christ is the primary secret of our sanctification. Union with Christ will help us steer between cold intellectualism and unbiblical mysticism, and between antinomianism and neonomianism as we pursue holiness.

In 1890 at a funeral service for a senior deacon at his church, C.H. Spurgeon cited the favorite expression of that brother, which was, 'Lord Jesus, we are one with Thee. We feel that we have a living, loving, lasting union with Thee.' Said Spurgeon, 'Those three words have stuck by me; and ever since he has gone, I have found myself repeating them to myself involuntarily - 'a living, loving, lasting union.' He owed everything to that.' So also do we.

2. The Inseparability of Justification and Sanctification

We learn from Marshall that our union with Christ means that justification and sanctification are inseparable in our spiritual life. Union with Christ in our status before God (i.e. justification) must bring us closer to Christ in daily living (i.e. sanctification). As Thomas Chalmers wrote about Marshall, 'I do not know an author who sets forth the gospel in a way so suited to promote the conjoint interests of peace and holiness.'

The entire Puritan movement, of which Marshall was an important part, was as inevitably an outgrowth of the Reformation as sanctification inevitably flows out of justification. Marshall's book teaches us that sanctification cannot increase in our lives and churches without the Word-centered teaching of gracious justification by faith.

In this, two extremes must be avoided: First, justification emphasized at the expense of sanctification (as was generally true for the antinomians); and second, sanctification emphasized at the expense of justification (as was generally true for the neonomians). Like Marshall, we must strive for a healthy balance of both.

We must also vigorously promote a biblically based religion in which both justification and sanctification are experienced. As it is essential to be united with Christ in justification, so is it essential that we know him experientially in sanctification. The religion of Marshall and the Puritans was filled with vitality because it encompassed both.

3. The Inseparability of Christ and His Word

We need to learn from Marshall and the Puritans how to entrench ourselves in the eternal truths of Holy Scripture. The Puritans found all they needed in the Bible. Here was a system of doctrine, a manual for worship, a church order that was God-breathed, comprehensive, all-sufficient, and utterly compelling in its power and authority. We too must relish this Word-centered authority. We must aim for what Thomas Boston says is 'strictly scriptural,' neither adding an unending cycle of works to Scripture, nor subtracting from Scripture to soften the demands of Christ's lordship.

We learn to know the personal Word, Christ Jesus, from the written Word, the Bible. Marshall calls us to cherish once again the vision of God spread across the pages of Scripture. He calls us to love the Lord Jesus in all his full-

ness. In Christ there is majesty and glory, justification and sanctification. In him are all the treasures of wisdom. In him are mercy and love beyond degree (Col. 2:9). Marshall would have us bow before Christ as Lord of all salvation; he would have us know that there is no knowledge of Jesus apart from his Word and Spirit.

4. The Inseparability of Mind and Soul

We need to learn from Marshall that holiness involves the mind as well as the heart. Much has already been said about the necessity of the heart in religion. It must now be stressed that the mind also plays an important role.

Unfortunately, many people forget this today. The 1980 Gallup Poll on religion reported, 'We have a revival of feelings but not of the knowledge of God. The church today is more guided by feelings than by convictions. We value enthusiasm more than informed commitment.'

Marshall showed that we do need to think in order to be holy. He challenged the idea that holiness is only a matter of emotions. Many people today think that holiness is only a matter of the emotions. Churches promote that kind of thinking, too, by offering mindless entertainment rather than thoughtful worship. Many also forgo the teaching of solid, biblical doctrine, even though the Holy Spirit admonishes us to pay attention to doctrine (1 Tim. 4:13). Paul tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2).

The Puritans worshipped and loved God with their minds. They viewed the mind as the palace of faith. They agreed with Pascal who wrote, 'Man is but a reed, the weakest thing in nature, but he is a thinking reed.' Many antinomians, like many charismatics today, set mind and heart against each other. They thus attacked the Puritan stress on reason. One of Anne Hutchinson's followers wrote: 'I would rather have such a one that speaks from the mere motions of the Spirit without any study at all, than any of your learned scholars, although they may be fuller of Scriptures.'

The Puritans believed that knowledge was the soil in which the Spirit planted the seed of regeneration in the soul. They taught that it was our duty to fill our minds with knowledge while praying that God would bless that knowledge to our souls. Head-knowledge and heart-knowledge are thus to be regarded as friends, not enemies. So John Preston wrote, 'In conversion, reason is elevated.' And Cotton Mather said, 'Ignorance is the mother not of devotion but of Heresy.'

Marshall insisted on combining the affections with reason. No one could accuse him of cold intellectualism or of a lack of emphasis on experimental religion. But he believed that holiness is to be promoted by addressing the mind; therefore he wrote meticulously about the biblical teaching on union with Christ.

God gave us minds for a reason. It is crucial that we become like Christ in the way we think. Our minds must be disciplined by the Word and enlightened by faith, then put into God's service in the world. We ought to be challenged by Puritans such as Marshall to use our intellect to further God's kingdom through worship, evangelism, apologetics, and vocation. Without clear thinking, we will never be able to counter the culture in which we live, work, and minister. We will become empty in ourselves, non-productive, and narcissistic, lacking a developing interior life. Beware of those who in the supposed interests of spirituality ignore or even deny the place the mind has in the teaching of Scripture, in the man Christ Jesus, and in mankind in general, created in God's image.

A flabby mind is no badge of honor. A mindless Christianity will foster a spineless Christianity. An anti-intellectualistic gospel will spawn an irrelevant gospel that doesn't get beyond 'felt needs.' That's what is happening in our churches today. We've lost our Christian mind, and for the most part we don't see the necessity of recovering it. We don't understand that where there is little difference between the Christian and non-Christian in what we think and believe, there will soon be little difference in how we live.

We need to learn from Marshall to aim for spiritual balance in all of life. The Puritans longed for the Spirit's work in their mind and heart, but they yearned no less for the Spirit's fruits in every aspect of their lives. For them there was no disjunction between the sacred and the secular; their entire lives were devoted to divine service as a fruit of union with Christ. Everything must be done to the glory of God.

I wish to thank Rev. John Marshall for his assistance on this article.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF UNION AND COMMUNION WITH CHRIST IN THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN OWEN (1616-1683)

by Pieter de Vries

Dr. Pieter de Vries is a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church and is a well-known writer and theologian. This is his second article on the theology of John Owen to appear in the Reformed Theological Journal.

Together with Augustine, John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards, Owen can be classed among the very greatest theologians in the history of the Christian church.¹ What links these men is that they all ascribed the salvation of man solely to the operation of the Triune God. Owen was born in 1616, and he died on August 24th, 1683. Two days before his death he wrote to his friend Charles Fleetwood: 'I am going to Him whom my soul hath loved, or rather who hath loved me with an everlasting love; which is the whole ground of all my consolation.' I am leaving the ship of the church in a storm, but whilst the great Pilot is in it the loss of a poore under-rower will be inconsiderable.'²

In this article, I shall not give an extensive biography of Owen, but I shall just mention a few highlights from his life. Owen was born a pastor's son. His father was a minister in the Church of England, the Anglican Church. But he wished that his church might become a more reformed church, in its liturgy and church order. Owen described his father as a faithful labourer in the Lord's vineyard, and a man of Puritan convictions.³

During his studies in Oxford John Owen was won for the Puritan principles by an inner conviction. Owing to the ecclesiastical climate that then was prevailing in Oxford, he had to end his studies. It seemed to him that the road to a prominent place in church or society was blocked forever. After having served as chaplain in two families of the nobility, he settled in London.

During his stay in London he went regularly together with a cousin to hear Mr. Edmund Calamy preach in St. Mary's Church in Aldermanbury. Once when they arrived there it appeared that Mr. Calamy could not come. His cousin wished to leave the church to go to another church near by, where a certain Mr. Arthur Jackson was to preach. But Owen decided to stay where he was. A village pastor, whose identity Owen never has been able to make sure, preached from Matthew 8:26 'Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith?' During that sermon Owen's doubts whether he himself was really reborn vanished. He received the certainty, there and then, that God had accepted him as his child.

In a very short time the political and ecclesiastical situation changed in a very drastic way. Parliament had a conflict with the king, and in 1643 it abolished the episcopate. So it became possible for Owen to become a pastor. As a pastor he served two congregations. His first congregation was Fordham. Before he left that congregation he was invited to preach to the members of Parliament. This sermon was preached on April 29th 1646, from the text in Acts 16:9 'And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, come over into Macedonia, and help us.'⁴ That sermon was printed under the title: *A Vision of Unchangeable, Free Mercy*. In his second congregation, Coggeshall, Owen came into contact with Oliver Cromwell. More and more that general became the real ruler of the country. Cromwell and Owen cooperated closely, and they felt themselves attracted to each other. Later on that friendship diminished a bit, because Owen viewed the plan to offer the British crown to Cromwell sceptically.

Owen accompanied Cromwell on his several campaigns in Ireland and Scotland, as his army chaplain. Owing to his connections with Cromwell Owen was appointed as dean of Christ Church in Oxford, and somewhat later also as vice-chancellor of Oxford university. So the man who had to leave Oxford because of his Puritan principles got a leading position in the same university!

When in 1660 the monarchy was restored in Britain, Owen's academic career ended. During the remainder of his life he exerted himself to safeguard the Protestant character of England, and to maintain the religious liberty of those orthodox Protestants who because of their consciences had had to leave the Church of England, the so-called Dissenters. In many of his writings, Owen expounded his views on the church, the civil government, and their mutual relationship. Besides writing many books, Owen served as a pastor of a congregation that was formed according to the principles of Congregationalism. Until the year 1673, its members belonged almost exclusively to the higher classes of society. In that year Owen's congregation united itself to another congregation.

Even after the restoration of the monarchy, Owen continued to maintain contacts with prominent persons in Government, among whom was the King himself. That appears from the following anecdote. King Charles II had heard that Dr. Owen had gone to hear a sermon by John Bunyan, a tinker by profession, a man with no academic schooling at all. When Charles II asked Owen what could move him to listen to such a preacher, Owen answered: 'Could it please your Majesty, if I could possess that tinkers ability for preaching, I would gladly relinquish all my learning.'

Owen felt himself of one mind spiritually with Bunyan and his preaching, but he realized that he lacked the gift of saying things as simply as Bunyan could do. Whoever compares the writings of Owen and Bunyan will endorse both facts.

The place of union and communion with Christ in the theology of Owen

There is no subject on which Owen has written with so much joy, as on union and communion with Christ. Owen makes a distinction between union and communion with Christ. At his regeneration a Christian is united with Christ. From that moment on his state is established in Christ. Every Christian is in the state of union with Christ. Subsequently, he exercises communion with Christ. Seen from the side of the Christian that exercise of the communion is sometimes stronger than at other times. All the works of Owen are pervaded by this theme of union and communion with Christ. Nevertheless, some of his books are in this respect of special interest, namely:

- *A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ*
- *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*
- *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ Applied unto Unconverted Sinners and Saints under Spiritual Decays*
- *On Communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost*
- *A Vindication of some passages in a Discourse concerning Communion with God*

Communion with Christ is not only a communion in and through faith, but also a communion in love. Owen knows how to speak and write in a very tender way about that communion in love. Using figures of speech from the Song of Songs, he compares the relation between Christ and his people to the relation between husband and wife. In the last analysis, however, the bond between Christ and his church is stronger and deeper than that between husband and wife. The bond with him is not even broken by death. His love is an eternal love. Here we perceive in Owen the influence of the bridal mysticism of Bernard of Clairvaux. Like Calvin, Owen appreciated this medieval theologian very much.

Owen does not only speak about Christ as the great object of faith, but also of love and joy. In his description of faith Owen has not included feeling. But it is nevertheless his conviction that faith is always in some measure joined with feeling. In his sermon on The Strength of Faith he declares that the soul satis-

fies her feeling in her interest and joy in a sweet and desirable Saviour.⁶ We can ascertain that not just with Owen, but also with the Puritans in general, feeling occupies a more important place than with the Reformers.

For Owen, there is no contradiction between the certainty of faith, and being tempted and in conflicts. Also joy in God and godly sorrow can exist side by side. The joy in God does not completely end that godly sorrow and grief because of our sins. And Owen is also convinced of the fact that there is always mingled some joy in that godly sorrow, because it is godly. Next to that he knows about spiritual desertions, side by side with an unspeakable joy, which things often succeed each other in time. Sometimes the hearts of believers are filled with a joy that is truly unspeakable, albeit for a limited time in most cases. And he also speaks about feelings of joy that are indeed joined to faith, but that also exceed it. Thanks to the indwelling of the Holy Ghost believers here on earth are sometimes privileged to taste the joys of heaven. Then especially the importance of feeling becomes evident. Owen makes us think here of Augustine, who has spoken in such a moving way about God himself as the chiefest good, and the fountain of deepest joy. Like other Puritans, Owen connected the Augustinian-Bernardian heritage with the central theme of the Reformation, namely justification by faith alone. Owen sees trusting on something other than Christ in order to be able to stand before God, as spiritual adultery. Within the framework of justification by faith alone, he speaks about the 'nuptial tie' between Christ and his church, and about the feelings that are connected with that tie. Particularly the knowledge that the ground of their salvation lies completely outside them, and in Christ, gives joy to believers and makes them adhere closely to Christ.

Finally, I illustrate the central significance of union and communion with Christ in Owen's theology with the following event. On the day of his death William Payne, to whom Owen had entrusted the printing of his book *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ* came to tell him that the process of printing this book was just started that day. Owen's response to these words was: 'I am glad to hear that, but oh, brother Payne, that long-awaited day has come at last in which I shall see that glory in a different way than I ever did, or was capable to see it in this world.'⁷

The structure of Owen's theology

Owen places union and communion with Christ always within the framework of the fact that God is the Triune God. The Mediator, with whom the Christian is allowed to have communion, is given to him by the Father, and is applied to his heart and life by the Holy Ghost. For Owen the doctrine of the

Holy Trinity is fundamental, and the very core of all Christian doctrine and of the Christian experience of the faith. In article number 9 of the Belgic Confession of Faith, about the Trinity, we read 'all this we know as well from the testimonies of Holy Writ as from their operations, and chiefly by those which we feel in ourselves.' This way of thinking we find also with Owen. In this connection I am thinking especially about his book *On Communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost*. Owen writes there that we have communion with the Father in his love, with the Son in his grace, and with the Holy Ghost in his sanctifying and comforting communion.

In connection with the central significance that Owen gives to the Trinity, Owen's theology has a triple structure; namely God and his decrees, Christ and his atoning work, and the Holy Ghost and his application of salvation. In Owen's theology, justification has its own very special place. Unlike Calvin, he did not treat the doctrine of justification from the viewpoint of the work of the Holy Ghost. From Owen's works *The Death of Christ, Of the Death of Christ, The Price He paid, and the Purchase He Made and Of the Death of Christ, and Justification* - it is at any rate very clear that he joined justification very closely with the atonement. In the doctrine of the atonement Owen emphasized that Christ did not obtain the possibility, but the reality of the atonement. Closely linked to that view he propounded that not only the ground and foundation of justification lies wholly without us, but also that justification itself lies completely finished and ready in Christ. In his later work *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone*, he implicitly repudiated the thought that justification as such precedes faith, but he still emphasized that the ground of salvation lies completely outside man. For Owen, this is a fundamental thought. And therefore he joined justification closer to the work of Christ than to the work of the Holy Ghost. By consequence justification has its own very special place in Owen's theology, between the atonement and the work of the Holy Spirit.

God's good pleasure toward man, the preaching of the Gospel, and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit

Owen's first book was directed against Arminianism, as this was propagated in his days in the 'High Church' faction of the Church of England. The full title of that work is *A Display of Arminianism: Being a Discovery of the Old Pelagian Idol, Free Will, with the New Goddess Contingency, Advancing themselves into the Throne of the God of Heaven, to the Prejudice of His Grace, Providence, and Supreme Dominion over the Children of Men*. Owen was deeply convinced of God's sovereignty. God is in all respects the first and the

last. And therefore Owen taught emphatically the so-called 'double predestination.' He also maintained the decree of God's reprobation, to emphasize therein that men's doings are never an independent factor in God's decrees. God does everything after the counsel of his own will. In respect to predestination it must be added that Owen was deeply convinced of the total depravity of fallen man. A sinner is not saved because he himself took the initiative, but because God willed it.

In no way did Owen see election as a barrier to the preaching of the Gospel. Quite to the contrary, he saw the preaching of the Gospel in itself as a fruit of election. This is clear from the full title of the first sermon he preached as a man of just thirty years old to the members of the Lower House of Parliament. That title is: *A Vision on Unchangeable, Free Mercy, in Sending the Means of Grace to Undeserving Sinners*. In this sermon Owen follows the way of thinking which we find in the first part of the Canons of Dort. In his good pleasure God mercifully sends messengers of those most joyful tidings of his love, to whom he will and at what time He pleases, by whose ministry men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified.

For Owen, the preaching of the Gospel was Christ's marriage-proposal to the sinner. The first part of *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ to Unconverted Sinners, and Saints under Spiritual Decay bears the title Exhortation to Such as are Strangers to Christ*. In a very moving and direct way Owen explains there that every sinner is welcome to Christ. His invitations are proof of that. From two examples that follow, we can see how Owen was working this out in a concrete way. 'Consider therefore the infinite condescension and love of Christ in his invitations and appeals to come to him for life, salvation, mercy, grace, peace and eternal blessedness.'⁸ And: 'Consider that He is just as mighty to save us, as He is ready and willing to receive us.'⁹ In the sermon *The Strength of Faith* Owen states: 'Says God, "O ye sons of me, why will ye die?" I beseech you, be friends with me; let us agree; - accept the atonement. I have love for you; take mercy, take pardon; do not destroy your own souls'. (9:41). To sinners it is not asked as a duty to ascertain firstly that they are regenerated, and only after that to fly to Christ in faith; but in the very first place they are called to believe that remission of sins is offered to them in the blood of Christ. Neither is it the duty of man to ask himself whether he has faith or not, but one is called to actually believe. Faith proves and manifests itself by its operations.

The free offer of grace does not mean, however, that man as he is born, a natural, fallen man, possesses the power and the willingness to accept Christ.

Unless our eyes are opened by the Holy Ghost, the invitations of Christ do not make an impression on us at all. Man's depravity is so abysmal that he rejects Christ. Only by the renewing operation of the Holy Ghost are we enabled and made willing to embrace Christ. Owen does not play off the free offer of grace against man's depravity, as this is done by both Arminians and Hyper-Calvinists. Arminianism denies man's total depravity, with a view to commanding faith and conversion. And Hyper-Calvinists do exactly the opposite thing: they think that the appeal to faith and conversion is inconsistent with man's total depravity.

The preaching of the Gospel has in Owen's thinking its place within the framework of Christ's prophetic office. Very moving is the way in which Owen writes in his *Lesser Catechism* about Christ's prophetic office. There we read that Christ as a Prophet reveals to our hearts, from the bosom of his Father, the way and truth whereby we must come unto him.¹⁰ Christ teaches us as Prophet in order that we shall see our need of him as Priest, to be taught to obey him as King. Owen gives most attention to the priestly office of Christ.

We should never detach those three offices from each other. A Christian knows Christ as Prophet, Priest and King. But the most central of those is the priestly administration of Christ. This constitutes the core, the very heart of his mediatorial work, as well as of the experience of the life of faith of the Christian. It is significant that Owen wrote a very comprehensive commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. In no book of the New Testament is the priestly office of Christ described so fully as in this book.

The work of Christ

Owen was a Reformed theologian. The Reformers' conception of the relationship between the Holy Scriptures and the Church was fundamental to him. It is not that the church has to decide how we should understand the Bible, but on the contrary, from the Bible we know what the church is. This does not alter the fact that Owen, like the Reformers, felt himself linked to the catholic heritage from the ages before the Reformation. In this respect he estimated the Early Church much more positively than the Church of the Middle Ages. Like the Early Church, Owen confessed God to be the Triune God, and Christ as God manifested in the flesh. Owen did not reject, however, the theology of the Middle Ages completely. Quite the contrary, his doctrine of the atonement is deeply influenced by the views of the archbishop of Canterbury in the Middle Ages, Anselm. Like Anselm, Owen taught that Christ made satisfaction to God's justice. It can also be noticed that Owen was very much impressed by the unity of the church, in her common faith in Christ, and her love to Him.

Owen connected the knowledge of the Person of Christ and his benefits indissolubly with each other. Our love towards Christ is based on all that which he did for us, and still does for us as our Mediator. When we get to know Christ really, we do live from his merits at the cross, and in the power of his resurrection. Christ's suffering as a substitution for his people was for Owen the very heart of the Christian religion. In *Vindiciae Evangelicae ; or the Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated and Socinianism Examined*, Owen writes about the death of Christ from three viewpoints; namely redemption as a price paid, atonement as a sacrifice, and satisfaction as a bearing of the punishment of sin.¹¹ Those viewpoints: a price paid, a sacrifice, and satisfaction complement each other. Owen shows a marked preference for the figure of the payment of a debt. It would be contrary to God's righteousness to punish sins twice. Christ has completely taken our place. Therefore, it is impossible that those for whom Christ died will be lost. Here we see the close connection that Owen sees between the nature of the atonement, and its extent. The extent of the atonement was for Owen a very weighty point.

His book *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* has this as its central theme. To Owen, the doctrine of particular, that is personal, redemption does not cast a shadow over the Gospel, but is an essential part of its contents. Christ did not obtain the possibility of the atonement, which only by faith becomes a reality; but he obtained the atonement itself. Faith is not a complement to the atonement, but a fruit of it. Owen found this doctrine of particular redemption in Scripture. And we can quote St. John's Gospel, in which Christ says that he lays down his life for his sheep; and also the New Testament Epistles. When the apostles write that Christ died for us, they direct themselves not to the world, but to believers who never can be separated from the love of God. Especially, Owen referred to Romans 8: 31-39 in this connection.

Owen denies that the doctrine of particular atonement is conflicting with the well-meant call to believe. He propounds that men are not invited to believe in Christ because Christ died for them; but because they are sinners, and Christ died for sinners. The first thing that we should tell a sinner is not that Christ died for him personally, but that there is a way of atonement and acceptance, that with God remission of sins can be obtained. Although the atonement was accomplished for the elect, in itself its worth is all-sufficient. Therefore Owen can speak about the unlimited worth of the blood of Christ, that was sufficient to save thousands of worlds. Already it has been pointed out how Owen in his preaching offered Christ without any reservation. Particular atonement does not diminish for Owen the offer of grace. But it is made completely clear which kind of Saviour is offered to sinners, namely, such a Saviour who is in every

respect all-sufficient. In defence of the doctrine of particular atonement Owen does not only appeal to Scripture, but he also appeals to the consciences of all Christians. The foundation on which their comfort rests, is taken away when the pronouncements in Scripture that Jesus died for us, reconciled us with God, bought us, etc., signify nothing more than that all these things possibly may follow from all that Christ did. Because Christ died for his People, it is impossible that they will be lost. In the doctrine of particular atonement Owen sought to stress the solidity of God's faithfulness and grace. That is clear also from the following passage from a letter he wrote to Cromwell. Owen wished Cromwell 'that you may have the presence of our good God, in a living feeling of his unchangeable love in Christ towards your person.'¹² Quite rightly, Wallace saw a connection between Owen's view of the range of the atonement, and the very Christ-centred character of Owen's theology. The doctrine of particular atonement shows us how personal is the character of the death of Christ for us.

The work of the Holy Spirit

Owen wrote a treatise in nine parts about the work of the Holy Spirit, under the name *Pneumatologia*. Like Calvin, Owen can be characterised as a 'theologian of the Holy Spirit'. Owen was conscious that nobody before him in all the history of the church had entered so much into the various aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit as he did himself.

The fountain of all spiritual life is for Owen renewal by the Holy Spirit, and its content is the communion with Christ. In *A Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit* the emphasis is laid very much on the first thing. In his renewing work the Holy Spirit is always the Spirit of Christ. In Owen's theology the attention, however, to the Holy Spirit and his work does not diminish in the least the attention to Christ's Person and work. To Owen, the Holy Spirit is always the Spirit that proceeds from the Father as well as from the Son. Owen does not like to speak about the Holy Spirit without speaking about Christ, nor about Christ without the Holy Spirit.

When Owen speaks about the work of the Holy Spirit, the chief point for him is to make clear that the Spirit is absolutely sovereign in the regeneration of sinners. Sinful man neither can nor wishes to prepare himself for the receiving of grace. Regeneration is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in the heart and life of a person. The sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in regeneration underlines that one is saved by free grace alone. In Owen's theology union and communion with Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit form as it were 'the bridge' between God's eternal good pleasure and the realisation thereof in time. For God's good pleasure from eternity is realized in the way of communion

with Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In his development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit Owen used, according to his own testimony, three main sources: Holy Scripture, the opinion of the Early Church, and the experience of those that are sincere and exercised believers.¹³ Among the fathers of the Church, Augustine occupied for Owen a special place. Owen sees Augustine's life as a pattern for the Spirit's work in the heart. It is Owen's conviction that nobody equals Augustine in his close observation of the hidden operations of the Holy Spirit in the minds and souls of men.¹⁴ This is true for those operations of the Spirit which lead to conversion, as well of the activity of the Spirit in conversion itself. Augustine's conversion, as described by the man himself in his *Confessiones* is treated extensively in chapter 6 of book III of *A Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit*.¹⁵ We will pay attention to three aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit, as described by Owen; namely regeneration, sanctification, and the sealing with the Holy Spirit.

Regeneration

For Owen, spiritual life begins when a first principle of grace is communicated to man. The communication of such a first principle of grace takes place in regeneration. Then also union with Christ is effected. Owen distinguished regeneration, faith, justification and sanctification from each other logically, but not chronologically. In regeneration, the sinner is endowed with justifying and saving faith, which unites him with Christ, and causes him to walk with God in a holy life.

In *A Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit* Owen presents us with an extensive analysis of the nature of regeneration, and the way in which this is brought about. Before he enters into the topic of regeneration as such, he speaks about those operations of the Holy Spirit prior to regeneration. The thought that there is a preparation for regeneration is characteristic of Puritanism. The Puritans wished to make clear that faith in Christ does not originate in a vacuum. Packer pointed to the circumstance that for the Puritans the idea of a preparation for regeneration exists in an evangelistic context.¹⁶ Only a sinner who has been taught his lost state before God will flee to Christ. A preacher who points to the necessity of knowledge of sin and guilt acts like a doctor who makes clear to his patient that he is severely ill, in order to convince him that he needs to be placed under treatment.

To Owen, it is a sure fact that there exists a difference between conviction of sin and repentance toward God, or conversion. A person who has learned nothing more than a conviction of sin and guilt, will be lost for all that. Not always and infallibly do convictions of sin lead to a state of grace. When per-

sons are weighed down under convictions of sin, it is not our first task to comfort them, but to move them to faith in Christ. When the sinner by the regenerating operations of God's Spirit agrees to the invitations of the Gospel, the general operations of the Spirit do come to an end, and his saving operations begin. The Holy Spirit uses the invitations of the Gospel to unite a sinner with Christ. In that way the sinner passes from the covenant of works into the covenant of grace.

In connection with this distinction between general and special grace, Owen sees a difference between 'legal repentance' and 'evangelical repentance'. Legal repentance precedes regeneration and faith, while evangelical repentance is the result of it. The law teaches us what sin really is. In that sense the knowledge of sin is by the law. This knowledge of sin, however, only receives a spiritual and saving character by the knowledge of Christ. His sufferings for our sins humble and soften our hearts. Faith and evangelical repentance are inseparably connected to each other. In union with Christ, fear is taken away from the knowledge of sin, and this knowledge of sin then gets the form of a godly sorrow.

Sanctification

To Owen, regeneration is the root of sanctification. This does not mean, however, that sanctification is the 'automatic' result of regeneration. The new life within us is continually dependent on God's grace. Believers pray that the Holy Spirit will grant them continually inward, sanctifying and strengthening grace. Not only regeneration but faith also is called by Owen the root of all real obedience to God. Regeneration and faith are inseparably connected. The exercise of faith in the Person of Christ is the fountain of all evangelical obedience. Looking unto Jesus in a spiritual way is the means to become conformed to Him.

Sanctification is therefore a duty for believers only. For unbelievers, the first thing for them to do is not sanctification, but repentance toward God and faith in Christ. In connection with sanctification, Owen makes a remark that is worthy of consideration, and which I pass on to you, namely: to be holy is necessary, but to know that one is holy can be a temptation. Owen was very much convinced of the fact that believers have to struggle against their sinful nature during all their life. The thought that in this life we can conquer our sinful nature completely, was radically denied by him. The holiness of the gospel cannot be reached or maintained without a constant struggle against sin.

In The Nature, Power, Deceit and Prevalency of the Reminders of Indwelling Sin in Believers, he expressly paid attention to this subject. The

expression 'the sin that dwelleth in us' is found in Romans 7:20. Owen does not doubt, that in the second part of Romans 7 a believer is speaking. I wish to point out, that attention to the fact of the reality of indwelling sin is of great importance, not just theologically, but also psychologically, in the realm of pastoral care. The idea that a Christian in this life totally gets over the struggle against sin can lead to spiritual pride, or, on the other side, to depression. And neither of these can be viewed as fruits of the Spirit! The reality of our remaining sinfulness emphasizes that only by faith in Christ and by the righteousness that is given to us in him are we righteous before God. Even when there is much within us that is damnable, there is nevertheless no damnation for us, because we are righteous before God in Christ, and so we have peace with him.

Sealing with the Holy Spirit

In his views on the sealing with the Holy Spirit Owen went along his own path, when compared with his Puritan friends and contemporaries. In the Puritan tradition, in which Owen grew up, many had gradually come to the opinion that there is a chronological distance between coming to faith, and the sealing with the Holy Spirit. Sealing with the Holy Spirit was seen as a subjective experience, which gives to believers the full certainty of faith. Initially, Owen agreed with this view, which was generally accepted among Puritans. In *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* Owen writes that the Holy Spirit pours out the love of God in the hearts of believers, after they have been justified and received peace with God. This tender experience is identified by him with the sealing with the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ In 1657, however, Owen writes in *Of Communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost* that he is not completely sure about the significance of the meaning of the sealing with the Holy Spirit. But he is convinced that this sealing means in the first place that God protects us.¹⁸ In contrast to many of his friends, he proceeds from the thought that it is not the promises that are sealed, but believers. In the work just now mentioned, he understands as the sealing with the Holy Spirit that we have a living sense of the love God has given us, together with a comforting conviction that he has been gracious to us and that flowing from the reality that the Holy Spirit conforms us to Christ.

In Part VIII of his *Pneumatologia*, namely *A Discourse of the Holy Spirit as a Comforter*, which was published after his death, we find Owen's mature views on the sealing with the Holy Spirit. Consciously, Owen draws conclusions from the insight to which he had already come beforehand, that it is not the promises that are sealed, but rather the persons of believers. He now understands as the sealing with the Holy Spirit the communication of the Spirit himself to believers, and not his gracious operations in respect to believers. 'These gracious oper-

ations he sees as a result, an effect, of the sealing with the Holy Spirit. The sealing with the Holy Spirit takes place at the same moment as the effectual calling. Then we are placed in a new relationship to God, Christ, and the saints.¹⁹

Like the mainstream of Puritanism, Owen connects the sealing with the Holy Spirit with the certainty of faith. From the communication of the Holy Spirit flows the comforting work of that same Spirit, and the continuing testimony of the Holy Spirit. Owen expressly denies that it is one definite act of the Spirit in believers that leads them to the certainty of faith.

The perseverance of the saints

For Owen, the perseverance of the saints is the crowning part of the doctrine of free grace. It is closely connected with the central doctrine of the Reformation, that is, the justification of the sinner by faith. It is impossible that true believers fall from their state of being justified. In the dogma of the saints perseverance all chief points of the doctrine of free and sovereign grace meet. God's love is without end because it is also without beginning, for God's decrees are unchangeable. It is impossible that those for whom Christ died will be lost. In regeneration the Holy Spirit is communicated to believers permanently.

Owen explained his views on perseverance extensively in *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*. In this book he appeals not only to several Reformed theologians, but also to Augustine and to an archbishop from the Middle Ages, Thomas Bradwardine. Like Anselm, Bradwardine had been archbishop of Canterbury. This shows us that Owen consciously agreed with the Augustinian tradition of the church before him in his doctrine of grace. Owen points out that this doctrine is used by God as an instrument to give to his children a deep sense of his love. It guarantees to us that we cannot only be sure of our faith, but also of our ultimate salvation and blessedness. For believers this certainty that God's love is unchangeable is a source of great joy. Because this comfort is connected indissolubly with the sacrifice and prayer for us of Christ, Owen declares that this doctrine makes Christ sweet and lovely to the soul.

Conclusion

Before anything else, Owen wished to think theologically in strict adherence to Holy Scripture. Because Scripture teaches us that salvation is altogether by grace, Owen was a convinced Reformed theologian. At the same time, this strict Calvinist was rather mild in his thoughts about other people. More than once he put forward that there are persons who deviated doctrinally, but who neverthe-

less gave evidence of a true spiritual life. That spiritual life was not decided, according to his opinion, by acute dogmatic insights. He was convinced of the fact that the doctrine of justification can be formulated in a defective way by some, but that nevertheless this justification as a spiritual reality is the portion of all true believers through all ages. It often attracted his attention that very often theologians express themselves in a different way in their meditations and prayers, than in their doctrinal writings. Justification can therefore be the portion of those who are lacking a correct notion of the doctrine of justification. Among other things, it appears here that Owen would not just be a Reformed theologian, but also a Catholic (using this word in its original meaning) theologian.

Owen wrote his theological treatises from a profound knowledge of the writings of theologians of his own time; but also he was acquainted with all the main thinkers from the whole of church history. He preached to the members of the British Parliament, admonishing them to apply their power and influence in the service of him who is the Prince of the kings of the earth. He was also a shepherd of souls, who wished to lead the unconverted to Christ, and to build up God's children in the most holy faith. Precisely in that way the Christian is taught the true and well-pleasing form of faith before God: it is and remains always the form of a beggar.

When we try to understand and pass on the biblical message, there always arise questions, like: Who is God?, how can we be righteous before Him?, how can we live for His glory? When trying to answer these questions Owen is one of God's saints that can serve as a guide to us. Packer characterizes the Puritans as 'spiritual giants'²⁰. Of Owen, this can be said, not only in respect to his piety, but also with an eye to the theological strength and depth of his mind. At the same time we should add to this that Owen knew very well that all theological formulations are defective, and fall short of the reality. In this aspect also, we can learn from him.

Owen concludes his *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ* with these words: 'There is nothing farther for us to do herein, but that now and always we shut up all our meditations concerning it with the deepest sense of self-abasement, out of a sense of our unworthiness and insufficiency to comprehend those things, admiration of that excellent glory which we cannot comprehend, and vehement longings for that season when we shall see Him as he is, be ever with Him, and know Him even as we are known.'²¹

In all Owen's theology the glory of God is the central idea.

References

- 1 In this article Owen's works are quoted in the so called Goold edition. This edition was published between 1850 and 1855 by Johnstone en Hunter, London and Edinburgh. It contains all Owen's works in 24 volumes. A reprint of this edition with the exception of the Latin works in volumes 16 and 17 was produced in the last century by The Banner of Truth. In the quotations from Owen reference is made to the volume and page numbers in Goold's edition.
- 2 *The Correspondence of John Owen, With an Account of his Life and Work*, ed. P. Toon, Cambridge 1970, p. 174.
- 3 13:224.
- 4 8:3ff.
- 5 J. Asty, "*Memoir of the Life and Writings of John Owen, D.D.*", in *A Complete Collection of the Sermons of the Reverend and Learned John Owen, D.D.*, Londen 1721, p. xxx.
- 6 9:26.
- 7 A. Thomson, '*Life of Dr. Owen*', in *The Works of John Owen, Volume I*, ed. W.H. Goold, 1850, reprint London 1965, p. ciii.
- 8 1:422.
- 9 1:424.
- 10 1:468.
- 11 12:508.
- 12 *The Correspondence of John Owen*, p. 85.
- 13 3:10.
- 14 3:349.
- 15 3:337-365.
- 16 J.I. Packer, *Among God's Giants: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, Eastbourne 1991, pp. 48.
- 17 10:277.
- 18 2:242, 243.
- 19 4:405.
- 20 J.I. Packer, *Among God's Giants*, p. 11.
- 21 1:415.

BOOK REVIEWS

To Glorify God. Essays on Modern Reformed Liturgy. Edited by Bryan D. Spinks and Iain R. Torrance, T. and T. Clark, 1999, 272 pages, £24.95.

This book is made up of a series of essays examining two recent liturgies produced by Presbyterian churches, namely the *Book of Common Worship* (1993) of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and *Common Order* (1994, emended 1996) of the Church of Scotland. Both have exercised considerable influence on contemporary liturgical thought, especially in ecumenical circles.

The collection begins with several essays which chart the history of the composition of each book, with particular attention to the forces which shaped the final product and the goals which the compilers set for themselves. William Storrar also contributes a study which examines the cultural context of contemporary Scotland, but which raises issues of much wider interest. The next few essays focus on the theology reflected in both books, looking at matters such as the view of Scripture embodied in the lectionaries, the doctrine of God and of Christ, and universalism with regard to salvation (an essay by David Searle of Rutherford House). The later essays give attention to specific rites contained in the liturgies, in particular baptism, funerals, daily prayer and the Eucharist. The collection concludes with essays on liturgical language in *Common Order* (by Bridget Nichols) and on the differences between Patristic and Reformed approaches to liturgy (by Donald Macleod). A few evangelical voices are to be heard, but most contributors are clearly of strongly ecumenical sympathies.

It may be asked why anyone from a non-liturgical tradition should give time and attention to such a book. (We leave aside the fact that unwritten but nevertheless unchangeable liturgies may be deeply inscribed in the minds of ministers and congregations). A collection like this is of interest from several points of view.

1. The essays emphasise the truth of the Latin expression *lex orandi, lex credendi*. In other words, the Church's worship ('praying') reveals the Church's doctrine ('believing'). The influence is in fact mutual, with worship shaping and being shaped by theology. The liturgies under review provide many examples of such influences. To note but a few, we can find influences from liberation theology, feminist theology, contemporary Trinitarian thinking and modern Christologies 'from below' (i.e. beginning with the human Jesus) making their presence felt to varying degrees. Such a study thus provides interesting insights

into the ways in which current theological thinking is filtering into mainline churches. In the *Book of Common Worship* a place is even found for prayers for the dead (see page 49).

2. Directions in ecumenical thinking are also evident in these liturgies. Prominent is the influence of post Vatican II Roman Catholic liturgical theology, which appears from time to time in the two Presbyterian manuals under review. At least some of those at the cutting edge of liturgical innovation owe much to Roman Catholic views.

3. These liturgies also show the influences being exercised on the churches by a variety of cultural forces. One of the most prominent is that of feminism, particularly in regard to 'inclusive language'. The compilers of both books are at great pains to avoid any language which could be perceived as offensive to women. This leads not only to the rejection of terms such as 'man' and 'mankind' when both male and female are in view, but to an even more dangerous minimising of masculine language applied to God. It is thus seen by some of the essay writers as commendable that God is seldom referred to as 'Father', something which is in fact a tragic loss for Christian piety.

4. Both liturgies demonstrate the trend in ecumenical circles to elevate the sacraments at the expense of the preaching of the Word. The main Lord's day service is thus regarded as normally including the celebration of the Eucharist, its omission being generally seen as undesirable. There is also great stress on the sacrament of baptism, with references to it being included in some cases even in the funeral liturgy, on the assumption that it says something about the spiritual state of the deceased. The underlying sacramentalism of the two liturgies is quite clearly evident.

In sum, this is a book which provides a useful overview of current developments in two large, though declining, denominations, of value to observers of the contemporary ecclesiastical scene.

W D J McKay

The Puritan Millennium. Literature and Theology 1550-1682 by Crawford Gribben, Four Courts Press, 2000, 320 pages, £39.50.

This fascinating book, which is the fruit of the author's doctoral research, examines from literary and also from theological perspectives the views of the millennium current among Protestant writers in the period 1550 to 1682.

In his introduction the author outlines some of the recent trends in scholarship regarding both puritanism and millennialism, demonstrating the difficulty of finding agreed definitions of either subject. Gribben's goal is to examine what he calls 'a puritan poetics', a term which may give those with a theological rather than a literary training pause for thought. The study will consider *how* the puritans presented their ideas, as well as examining what those ideas were. Drawing on the insights of Jacques Derrida, yet seeking to go beyond them, Gribben aims to demonstrate how the puritans produced texts which *teach*, which 'employ their form to enact their theology' (p.24). In this connection the literary term 'closure' is of great importance. The puritan writers, Gribben argues, avoided 'closing' their texts, thus requiring a response from their readers. To read their works is to be faced with demands for radical biblical changes in attitude and lifestyle.

The first main chapter presents an outline of the development of puritan apocalyptic ideas, with a valuable warning against trying to impose modern categories of 'millennial' views on the writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Each writer must be read on his own terms. The starting point for the puritans was the Augustinian interpretation of the vision of the millennium of Revelation 20 as being fulfilled in the present age. A wide variety of views is to be found among the puritans, even as to whether the millennium is a time of blessing or of trial. Different writers suggest different dates for the beginning of the millennium, and chronological speculations abound. Familiar figures such as Thomas Goodwin are to be found alongside much less familiar, yet influential, figures such as Thomas Brightman and Joseph Mede. Gribben provides a clear guide to what could otherwise be a scene of utter chaos. Indeed by the end of the period the ideas of the radicals and the Quakers were causing great confusion.

The application of millennial motifs to contemporary events is to be seen clearly in the writings of a group of theologians who were pivotal in the development of puritan millennial thinking and who are the subjects of the third chapter of Gribben's study. These are the Marian exiles, forced to flee to the Continent by the persecuting zeal of Queen Mary. Among the exiles was John

Foxe who developed a complex and detailed harmony of Scripture and church history which was widely disseminated. Gribben also gives close attention to the impact of the successive editions of the Geneva Bible, whose marginal notes were so influential on the puritan movement.

The remaining five chapters of the book focus on particular figures who were significant for the development of puritan millennialism, whilst setting them firmly in their historical context. Chapter 4 considers the Irish Anglican James Ussher, giving valuable insights into the religious conditions in Ireland at the time. Ussher is significant particularly for his idea of past and future millennial periods and for the role he assigned in his millennial scheme to the 'godly prince'.

Chapter 5 deals with Scottish Covenanter George Gillespie in the setting of the Westminster Assembly. Gribben traces how the unity between Scottish Covenanters and English Independents in eschatological matters was broken by disagreements over ecclesiology. In particular, Gribben examines Gillespie's sermon preached before the Westminster divines and the Members of Parliament on 27 March, 1644, just before unity broke down. Gribben's rhetorical analysis of Gillespie's sermonic technique may come as something of a surprise to those more familiar with devotional approaches to puritan sermons. Gillespie's employment of millennial categories to argue for the establishment of Presbyterianism is quite amazing.

The remaining chapters deal with the highly unorthodox views expressed by John Milton in his tract *Areopagitica*, arguing for the freedom of the press, with the ministry in Dublin of the English radical John Rogers, and with John Bunyan's writings, particularly *The Holy War*.

Gribben's study is thorough, yet accessible, and unafraid to challenge accepted views of its subjects. It must be remembered that this is a literary study, and so theologians may occasionally find themselves struggling with ideas and concepts from an unfamiliar discipline, especially in the chapter on Milton. They should persevere, nevertheless, as their minds will be stretched and their thinking enriched. On a more mundane note, it is perhaps consoling to find that the puritans were no more agreed on the meaning of such passages as Revelation 20 than are contemporary Christian writers (even Reformed ones).

Martin Luther's Theology, Bernhard Lohse, T & T Clark, 1999, Hdb. 393pp. £29.95.

Bernhard Lohse, of the university of Hamburg, was a leading Luther scholar in the twentieth century and an eminent church historian. This translation of his magisterial study of Luther's theology by Professor R.A. Harrisville is most welcome, and his editorial note indicates that no effort was spared in the interests of accuracy.

The book is divided into three parts. It begins with preliminary considerations relative to a description of Luther's theology: criteria for that description; the situation in the church around 1500; the prevailing theological situation; Luther's personal development and the uniqueness of his theology. This is followed by a review of the historical development of his theology and falls into fourteen sections which include the 'Reformation discovery', the attack on Indulgences, the disputes with Cajetan, Eck, Zwingli and Erasmus. This second part of the book also includes valuable material relating to Luther's exegetical and expository work before and after his conversion. Finally, Luther's theology is seen in its systematic context, and there are sixteen sections. These cover such themes as *Sola scriptura*, Reason and Faith, the Godhead of God, Christology, justification, law and gospel, the church, the sacraments, the doctrine of the two kingdoms and eschatology.

None of the chapters is long, but each one calls for pause and reflection. In terms of organization and lucidity this work is outstanding. Lohse is adept in showing what is distinctive in Luther's theology and what is not. Clearly the Reformer's theology was progressive, and we see that development before and after his conversion. We must not assume that at the period of his 'Reformation discovery', with new insights into passages like Romans 1:17, possibly in 1514 (although there is not certainty here), that Luther had 'arrived at a full-blown Reformation theology'. 'We must reckon with the fact that before as well as after his discovery, Luther underwent extended theological development. From 1513 up to approximately 1520, Luther developed his theology through continual recourse to signal biblical texts, and since 1516 to a greater extent in numerous controversies. Even after 1520, we can observe important further developments touching central theological questions ... The Reformation breakthrough marks an especially important caesura [pause] within a development extending over several years, rather than a total change in face of theological questions' (p.86). This fact of progressive theology is well illustrated by many quotations from Luther at different periods of his life and often from lesser known writings.

In reading this work, one may well ask if Luther discovered anything new; and the author demonstrates convincingly that he did not, but there was rediscovery. So Lohse writes, 'What Luther rediscovered in Paul was not unknown to theologians before him. Prior to Luther, however, the material significance of this understanding for the question of salvation was ignored. To that extent it must be said that in its essential content Luther's Reformation understanding does in fact represent something new' (p.95).

Lohse is most helpful in the controversial areas of 'the two kingdoms', the Lord's Supper and the ubiquity of Christ's body, justification, consubstantiation. Justification was central and crucial for Luther: with this doctrine 'the church stands or falls'. But it is remarkable to see how early, in his exposition of the Psalms (1513-15), he was grasping the evangelical doctrine. Thus on Psalm 32:2 he commented, 'This means that whoever is righteous, to whom God reckons righteousness (*reputat*) as He did to Abraham, according to the apostle (cf. Rom.4:3), to such a one He does not impute sin, because he reckons righteousness to him'. (p.56). In a sense Luther was Protestant before he knew it. To begin with he sometimes made statements that were inconsistent with his evangelical insights, but progressively and assuredly he came to a clear understanding of saving truth.

In Luther's theology of the cross, the motif of victory was prominent and his *theologia crucis* thoroughly antischolastic and always in balance with his theology of the resurrection. For Luther, as it should be for us, 'the resurrection is inseparably bound with the cross' (p.39). In this connection Luther made use of the motif of the 'happy exchange', a motif that originated in the ancient church and refers to Christ bearing our sin and his righteousness imputed to us(p.225f).

Luther was no doctrinaire theologian. As Lohse well says, 'Theologically, the consequence of Luther's inner conflicts as well as his resolve to become a monk was that theology's first concern is the question of salvation or damnation' (p.34). The urgency of that question never deserted him.

A disturbing feature of Luther's ministry was his attitude to the Jews. This work concludes with a ten page excursus on the subject. Luther's scathing comments and harsh proposals concerning the Jews are seen in historical and theological context, and no excuses are made for them. However we are reminded that religious tolerance as we know it was nonexistent in the sixteenth century, and also of the fear and horror with which Luther viewed the legalism of the Jewish religion.

Well does Scott Hendrix, of Princeton Theological Seminary, comment that this work is 'the best survey of Luther's theology in any language and supercedes all previous studies ...'. Lohse writes objectively, allowing Luther to speak for himself. His analysis of the Reformer's theology in its historical and systematic development is brilliant. The book is attractively produced and reasonably priced. There are a few misprints on page 172 that appear to be the work of a computer. The only serious omission that this reviewer could detect in this admirable work was the failure to show that Luther in his doctrine of the Lord's Supper rejected the concept of sacrifice which was and is central in Roman Catholic doctrine. For students of the Reformation period, this work is essential reading.

Frederick S. Leahy

John Calvin, Student of the Church Fathers, Anthony N.S. Lane, T & T Clark, 1999, Pb. 304pp. £17.50.

In this work the author gives a thorough and at times exhaustive appraisal of Calvin's acquaintance with and use of patristic writings. He is clearly an expert in his field and his book is a model for research. Throughout, the book is marked by scholarly caution and he adopts what he terms 'a hermeneutic of suspicion' (p.xi). So when he examines Calvin's citations, he assumes that 'he did not have a particular work to hand unless there is clear evidence to the contrary' (p.154).

He lays down eleven theses as the framework for his research. Calvin's citations must not be confused with modern footnotes. His use of the fathers is primarily polemical. In his commentaries Calvin is less interested in authorities as he debates with other interpreters. In the commentaries a negative comment may be a mark of respect as he interacts with another scholar. In considering what works Calvin actually read, availability of texts and pressures of time must be taken into account. A hermeneutic of suspicion is an appropriate safeguard. Caution must be exercised before claiming that Calvin used an intermediate source. A critical approach is necessary when determining which authors influenced Calvin, even when he cites them extensively. His use of a father does not exhaust his knowledge of that father. A critical examination of his use of the fathers can provide pointers to works he was reading at a particular time.

Finally, a careful reading of the evidence can lead to tentative or firm conclusions about specific editions used by Calvin.

Dr. Lane follows this methodology rigorously throughout his book, so that it can be studied with confidence. He shows the pitfalls which many students of Calvin have not avoided, and he does not hesitate to correct other scholars (e.g. p.152 fn. 9). He even corrects himself (e.g. p.195 fn. 21).

Calvin's respect for Augustine was profound. As Lane says, 'Augustine was accepted in the sixteenth-century Western church as the father *par excellence*. Calvin's Roman Catholic and Lutheran opponents themselves accorded him such authority', and so Calvin saw Augustine, whom he quotes some two thousand times, as 'the guardian of the teaching of the Early Church' (p.38f). But he frequently differed from Augustine. 'Augustine was so worthy of respect that his judgement had to be considered even when wrong'. (p.32).

An interesting feature in this book is the discussion of the possible influence on Calvin of the Scottish philosopher-theologian, John Major, who taught for a period in the *Collège de Montaigu* in Paris. Major taught John Knox at St. Andrews, but did he teach Calvin? Men like Francois Wendel and F.T. Torrance answer in the affirmative, but Lane agrees with the conclusion of Alexandre Ganoczy that it is impossible to determine with certainty that Calvin studied with Major. It is not certain that Calvin and Major overlapped at Montaigu. Lane feels that 'it is most unlikely that Major taught Calvin theology' and to hold to the view that Major taught Calvin, there would need to be evidence in the earliest writings of the Reformer (p.25). The case remains open, for, as Lane says in another connection, 'absence of evidence is not evidence of absence' (p.156).

While Calvin in his interpretation of the fathers followed the humanist principles of his day, 'he was not a detached impartial humanist scholar or a twentieth-century research student. The tools of humanist scholarship are used for a polemical end' (p.50f). For Calvin, and all the Reformers, Scripture alone was normative, and all the Reformers 'believed that they were reforming the old church and they therefore stood in continuity with the church of the early fathers and even, to a lesser extent with the church of the Middle Ages' (p.33f). Calvin saw the teaching of Rome in his day as essentially contrary to that of the fathers, and their teaching he constantly brought to the touchstone of Scripture.

Calvin would not admit that the true church had ever ceased to exist. As in the days of Elijah, God preserved a faithful remnant. He clearly saw the papacy

as Antichrist, and to the charge of schism he retorted that 'it is enough for me that it behooved us to withdraw from them that we might come to Christ' (p.45f). Yet he freely admitted that within the jurisdiction of Rome there were true Christians (ibid., cf. *Institutes* 4.2.12).

This book by the Director of Research at London Bible College is a mine of information and an indispensable guide to the student of Calvin. There are no short-cuts, no jumping to conclusions, no facile assumptions. This critical assessment of Calvin's use of the fathers is a needed tool that will be of immense service to teachers and students alike.

Frederick S. Leahy

The Victory of the Lamb, Frederick S. Leahy, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001. 126pp., £4.50

Many believers are too defeatist in their approach to the Christian life. Conscious of their own sinfulness and oppressed by the increasing wickedness of society, they view it as an unrelenting struggle in the face of presently superior odds, issuing in victory at the last, but in the meantime characterised by weakness and failure. Others, particularly in the charismatic tradition, lurch too far in the opposite direction, adopting an airy and unfounded triumphalism which proves ill-equipped to cope with the realities of living in a fallen world. This latest volume by Principal Leahy steps sure-footedly between these extremes, assuring us of Christ's overwhelming victory in the face of vicious Satanic resistance.

His survey of Scripture, which is what the book proves to be, begins with creation and the establishment of God's glorious kingdom, soon to be invaded and compromised by the devil. The Lord's response, in the mother-promise of a Saviour in Genesis 3:15, is instant and decisive and the remainder of the Old Testament describes the protracted struggle, as Satan seeks vainly to exterminate the Messianic line and to corrupt utterly the true religion. With the incarnation the two great antagonists meet in hand-to-hand combat and Christ binds his enemy by his triumphant withstanding of the temptations in the wilderness. Confused and irrational, Satan persists in his attacks, suborning Judas as an

agent of the crucifixion which will, ironically, secure the Saviour's victory. Even after the manifest triumph of Calvary the doomed opposition continues, as the devil attempts to bully or beguile into unfaithfulness the church of Christ. But all in vain, for King Jesus, risen and reigning, continues to redeem the elect and equip his church as he marches inexorably towards the final judgment and the renewal of creation. The book ends with the exhilarating vision of the Lamb of God in glory, slain, yet all-conquering and enthroned.

Here is biblical theology at its best, written by a preacher, pastor, systematic theologian and, above all, a Christian. The virtues of F. S. Leahy's previous books are again abundantly evident: thorough research, precise exegesis and solidly-based conclusions, shot through with flashes of heart-warming devotion. Particularly helpful is the way in which contemporary issues are introduced in the frequent paragraphs of application. The second chapter's mini-analysis of our modern culture, for example, is itself worth the price of the book.

Although written in a clear and accessible style, the content of *The Victory of the Lamb* is condensed and compact. This is not a book to be skimmed, but to be read slowly, pondered and prayed over. It will prove a rich mine for the preacher and, if absorbed, a spiritual tonic for the thoughtful believer. The College is honoured by this further contribution from its Principal to the edification and encouraging of the people of God.

Edward Donnelly

BOOK NOTICE

Does God Believe in Atheists? By John Blanchard, Evangelical Press, 2000, 655 pages, £19.95

In this encyclopaedic work well-known evangelist John Blanchard seeks to turn the tables on unbelief and put the spotlight on the weaknesses of alternatives to biblical religion. ('Atheism' is thus very broadly defined here). A great range of subjects is addressed, including the history of western philosophy, biology and origins, brain science, psychology, cults and world religions. No-one, of course, can have expertise in all these fields, and so Blanchard is heavily dependent on secondary sources, but he appears to have chosen them well. His style is popular and often the preacher's voice can be heard. Inevitably some topics are not covered in any detail, and on occasion the treatment, for example of world religions, is too brief to be really helpful in dealing with those who hold these views. Blanchard has, however, amassed a great deal of useful information which Christians will find of value in strengthening their own faith and in presenting the gospel to others. Most will probably dip into the book rather than reading it straight through. As for the 'atheists', they will have to answer for themselves.

David McKay