NOVEMBER 2007

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE
FOUNDED 1854

Theological Seminary of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland
37 Knockbracken Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT8 6SE

Vol. 23 **NOVEMBER 2007**

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Editorial Policy:
Contributors enjoy reasonable liberty in the exposition of the Reformed Faith.

Editorial Address:
MSS., books for review and correspondence should be addressed to Reformed Theological Journal, 37 Knockbracken Road, Belfast, BT8 4SE, Northern Ireland

Subscriptions:
Not posted £5.50. Posted to UK address £6.25. Rest of the World Surface Mail £6.85, $US 12.00, $Can 16.00, $Aus 19.50, €10.50.
In common with most periodicals, subscriptions run until cancelled.
Cheques to be made payable to Reformed Theological Journal. Subscriptions should be sent to Reformed Theological Journal (Subscriptions), 85 Shore Road, Greenisland BT38 8TZ, Northern Ireland.

The Reformed Theological Journal is on microfilm at Widener Library, Harvard Divinity School U.S.A. and is available for purposes of research.

ISSN 0268 - 4772
www.rpc.org/college/rtj
Email: rtj@rpc.org

CONTENTS

AN ANGRY GOD? THE PREACHING OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

W. D. J. McKay

David McKay is Professor of Systematic Theology, Ethics and Apologetics at the Reformed Theological College, Belfast.

The career of Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) generated much controversy while Edwards was alive, and has continued to be controversial ever since. Despite the admiration of some, there have been many who have expressed deep dislike of Edwards, sometimes bordering on hatred. A typical view is expressed by C. Angold in *A Literary History of the American People* (1931). According to Angold, Edwards was

> a pathetic, sickly, angry Puritan. A rabid theologian. The most bitter hater of men the American pulpit has ever seen ... there was no love in Jonathan Edwards for the human race.[1]

Angold did speak highly of Edwards' philosophical work in a later study, but his earlier tone is characteristic of many writers. With no claim to objectivity, G. Godwin wrote in *The Great Revivalists* (1950) that Edwards was "a sadistic, self-tortured, morbid, introvert, half insane, emotion-defective, psychopathic spiritual quack".[2]

Unsurprisingly, Edwards has been the object of much satire, as for example in this poem by Phyllis McGinley:

> Whenever Mr Edwards spake
> In Church about damnation
> The very benches used to quake
> For awful agitation...
> And if they had been taught aright
> Small children carried bedwards
> Would shudder lest they meet that night
> The God of Mr Edwards.
> Abraham's God, the Wrathful One,
> Intolerant of error –
> Not God the Father or the Son
> But God the Holy Terror![3]

Edwards has been blamed for many of the alleged faults in the American psyche, often on the basis of quotations from his preaching on the subject of hell. Most often quoted is his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"

preached in 1741, which, as we shall see, contains some very powerful imagery. Despite much favourable scholarly attention which Edwards has received in recent years, leading to considerable revision of earlier negative views, many know only of the Edwards of hellfire preaching and on this basis believe that the God of Jonathan Edwards is above all an angry God, one who knows little of love and grace.

In this study we will demonstrate that such a view of Edwards' theology and preaching is in fact a caricature, based at best on a highly selective reading of his sermons, which frequently misrepresents even those sermons considered. We will begin with a general consideration of Edwards' homiletical method and proceed to an examination of a number of sermons which will serve to show the true character of his preaching. From this it will be clear that the God of Jonathan Edwards is not the vengeful, angry God of the common caricatures.

1. Edwards' Homiletical Method

(i) Background

Edwards was the inheritor of the great Puritan tradition of biblical exposition which developed and flourished in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. The fundamental approach was set out in handbooks such as William Perkins' much-used book *The Art of Prophesying* (Latin, 1592; English, 1606)[4].

After consideration of the nature and contents of Scripture, Perkins set out some basic principles of biblical interpretation and exposition. Building upon these foundations, preachers were to "rightly handle" the Word of God (drawing on the language of 2 Timothy 2:15). Perkins discerns two elements in this task. The first he terms "resolution".

> Resolution is the unfolding of the passage into its various doctrines, like the untwisting and loosening of a weaver's web.[5]

The second element is "application".

> Application is the skill by which the doctrine which has been properly drawn from Scripture is handled in ways which are appropriate to the circumstances of the place and time and to the people in the congregation.[6]

Perkins goes on to list seven categories of hearers who should be addressed, including unbelievers who are both ignorant and unteachable, unbelievers who are teachable but ignorant, and hearers who already believe. The holiness of the preacher also receives emphasis.

From such roots developed the standard form of Puritan sermon which was used by a multitude of preachers, including Edwards himself. The structure is tripartite:

TEXT: this consisted of one or two pages of exegesis of the chosen verses, which provided the biblical foundation for all that the preacher would say.

DOCTRINE: this section began with a statement of the main doctrine to be drawn from the biblical text, which functioned like the thesis of an essay. The doctrine was then analysed and explained at length in a series of numbered heads called "reasons".

APPLICATION: (also designated IMPROVEMENT): a variety of applications to a range of types of hearers would be provided. A range of "uses" addressing issues of belief and conduct would be set out for the edification of the hearers.

The two latter sections usually took up about half of the sermon each. In his study of Edwards' preaching Wilson Kimnach notes the dynamic of this Puritan sermon form as a movement from the Word of God (TEXT) to human understanding (DOCTRINE) to human conduct (APPLICATION), and as a movement from the eternal to the temporal to the moment of experience.[7]

(ii) Tradition and innovation

Edwards had two immediate models available for the development of his preaching style, his father Timothy Edwards and his maternal grandfather Solomon Stoddard.

The sermons of Timothy Edwards manifested the full seventeenth century Puritan structure. Although the language was plain, a single sermon could have over fifty heads. The "argument" of such sermons consisted of a set of "proofs" which the hearers recorded in notebooks. Wilson Kimnach says of the sermons of Edwards senior, "If the material carried emotional force because of the issues involved, the main literary emphasis was upon instruction through clear, systematic exposition".[8]

Although the customary Puritan structure is evident in Stoddard's sermons, they are not as complex as those of Timothy Edwards. An example will show the kind of sermons with which Jonathan was familiar. Stoddard preached on Matthew 7:26 under the title "The False Hopes of Many Professing Believers", using the following structure:[9]

> DOCTRINE: Many professing Christians build their hopes of salvation upon a sandy foundation.
> QUESTION 1. When do men build their hopes upon a good foundation, upon a foundation that will not fail in time of trial?
> ANSWER: 1 The first foundation is the knowledge that we have accepted the

offer of the gospel

2 The second foundation is the knowledge that we have the other qualifications that salvation is promised unto.

QUESTION 2 When do men build their hopes upon a false foundation, and flatter themselves with vain hopes when their estate is naught?

ANSWER: 1 When they think they accept the offers of the gospel, but do not.

2 When they think they have the other qualifications that the promises are made to, but do not have them.

3 When they judge themselves heirs of salvation by false rules. (5 examples are given).

APPLICATION

USE OF INFORMATION

USE OF EXAMINATION

QUESTION 1 Have you anything substantial indeed to plead for yourselves?

ANSWER: Something may stand by you when you are dying that won't stand by you when you are dead.

QUESTION 2 Is there nothing substantial against you?

1 You may deceive men, but not God

2 You may deceive yourselves, but not God

USE OF WARNING 1. To ignorant professors

2 To such as have not had a distinct work of conversion

3 To such professors as are carried on in a still way

4 To old professors

The first half of the sermon provides a clear exposition of the stated doctrine, structured in a way that hearers would find easy to follow. The second half is devoted to wide-ranging application, designed to search the hearts of converted and unconverted alike. A variety of conditions of hearers is reviewed by the preacher, such that all are challenged, whether those battling with sin and temptation or those who experience no emotional extremes, who "are carried on in a still way".

Many of the characteristics of Stoddard's preaching will be found in the sermons of his grandson, Jonathan Edwards.

(iii) The Edwardsean model

a) *The surviving material.* Altogether some twelve hundred of Edwards' sermons survive, written in his notoriously difficult handwriting, many of them still unpublished. There are also three sermon notebooks in which Edwards recorded ideas for future sermons, together with a topical index of sermons preached.

The sermon manuscripts provide some fascinating insights into Edwards' approach to preaching. Since he marked down the history of the preaching of each sermon, it is possible to see that he preached some sermons up to six or

seven times. Often this involved the adaptation of a sermon to new circumstances, something that was especially necessary during Edwards' missionary work among the Indians after his expulsion from the pulpit in Northampton. As Kimnach comments, "Edwards many times revised his sermon with great deftness and artistic economy".[10]

The changes and adaptations can be traced physically in Edwards' manuscripts. For example, his sermon "God Glorified in Man's Dependence", preached in his congregation in Northampton, was expanded by three and a half leaves for delivery as a Thursday lecture in Boston on 8th July, 1731, in which form it became Edwards' first publication. Edwards would also adapt sermons by using parts of entirely different sermons, even on occasion taking two sermons into the pulpit in order to use the Doctrine of one and the Application of the other. Sometimes he would literally stitch pages from two sermons together for preaching and later separate them, with the result that among the surviving sermons are detached pieces of other sermons. The demands of settled congregational and of itinerant ministry required great flexibility on Edwards' part.

b) *An evolving model.* As is the case with any good preacher, Edwards' approach and style developed in the course of his career. In his early years of ministry in New York and in Bolton (Connecticut) Edwards' sermons seemed to reflect many of his own personal struggles as, barely out of his teens, he sought to provide a comprehensive definition of the Christian life in experiential terms. Of the New York sermons George Marsden comments:

> His carefully memorised sermons already had the relentless quality that characterized his later preaching. He left no loophole in his logic as he deduced his conclusions from his Scriptural premises (the "doctrine" portion of a Puritan sermon) and then showed how this set of proven truths must apply to his hearers (the "use" or "application").[11]

In the Bolton sermons Marsden discerns Edwards' great struggle to make profound ideas intelligible to ordinary people, in relation to which he comments, "Imagery and analogy were his most powerful weapons".[12]

The years from 1729 onwards, when Edwards was the sole pastor in Northampton after the death of Solomon Stoddard, saw the preacher's most sustained homiletical labours. His sermons were mainly instruments of awakening and pastoral leadership in a community which had become complacent in its religious observances and which was becoming divided into factions based on class and economic power. In a cultural context of growing optimism regarding human potential and capacities, even in the spiritual realm, Edwards stressed man's absolute helplessness with respect to salvation, as seen for example in "God Glorified in Man's Dependence" (1731). Although

adamant that moral conduct could not save, Edwards nevertheless stressed that salvation had a transforming effect on every aspect of daily life, as witnessed by sermon titles such as "The Duty of Charity to the Poor". In another sermon Edwards even states, "The way of the practice of all duty is the way in which persons should seek the grace of God".[13]

During the 1730s there had been times of awakening in the area where Edwards ministered, as recounted in his 1736 publication *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Word of God*.[14] It was, however, with the arrival of George Whitfield in 1740 that the Great Awakening began and Jonathan Edwards was thrust into a position of leadership through his powerful preaching. Besides preaching to his own and to other congregations, he was called upon to enter into the controversies raging around the events of the Awakening, answering both vehement opponents and destructive supporters. On 10th September, 1741, he delivered an address at the commencement of Yale College in which he analysed thoroughly the controversial phenomena of the Awakening, an address which was later enlarged to become *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741).[15] It was in this revival setting that Edwards preached the sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God", first in Northampton with little effect and shortly afterwards in Enfield with dramatic results.

Scholars such as Wilson Kimnach discern a third stage in the evolution of Edwards' preaching from 1743 onwards. Without neglecting his own people, Edwards had a growing concern for the wider world. As Kimnach puts it, "Edwards had moved from sharing a pastoral concern with the larger world to sharing a message for the larger world with his congregation as pastoral preaching".[16] In the aftermath of the awakening, much of his focus was on conduct as evidence of genuine conversion. These were also years of controversy: with his young people and their parents in the "bad book" episode and with many in the congregation over the qualifications for church membership. In July 1750 Edwards' pastorate in Northampton was terminated and he moved on to another sphere of ministry.

That ministry was in the Stockbridge Indian Mission where Edwards cared for a small congregation of around twelve English families and a transient population of Mohican and Mohawk Indians. For the English congregation he mostly re-used Northampton sermons from the 1730s. It is his preaching to the Indians that is of particular interest.

Ministry to the Indians required much flexibility and imagination on Edwards' part. Most obviously, he modified the form of his sermons, making them much shorter, and removed the traditional number heads and division titles. There is also a radical shift in approach from his former meticulous analysis of the biblical text to more general comprehensive statements of truth, a shift from analysis to synthesis. A sermon such as "He That Believeth Shall

Be Saved" (1751), based on Mark 16:15-16, sums up Edwards' view of the Christian faith in a few pages. It is noteworthy that, although the diction and sentence structure are relatively simple, the thoughts are not. The message is not "dumbed down" for Indian hearers, but is stated in a way which Edwards believed was suited to their capacities, including culturally relevant references to hunting and warfare. Edwards demonstrated right to the end of his preaching career a striking sensitivity to the different needs of different audiences.

c) *Significant aspects of Edwards' method.* From what has already been said, it will be evident that Jonathan Edwards was a convinced exponent of the Puritan "plain style" of preaching, in contrast to the elaborate style of prominent Anglican preachers such as Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626) or John Donne (1571/2-1631). His aim was to expound the Scriptures, drawing out the theological content of each text and applying it directly to the range of hearers present in the congregation. In no way does this imply any carelessness on Edwards' part in the making of his sermons. As Kimnach says, "Edwards was a conscious stylist and a meticulous craftsman of verbal nuance in his revisions".[17] Edwards' repetition of sermons on a number of occasions was not a matter of repeating identical content in a wooden manner, but, as noted previously, sermons were adapted to new audiences and situations in a carefully thought-out manner. "Edwards many times revised his sermon with great deftness and artistic economy",[18] to quote Kimnach once again.

The careful structuring of the different points of the sermon indicates Edwards' high regard for logic, a regard shared by all educated men of the time. Indeed, as George Marsden points out, "In New England, ordinary parishioners had cut their eyeteeth on the logic of carefully argued sermons".[19] In such a cultural environment Edwards' great intellectual powers were a mighty weapon, but also a source of danger if not combined with an understanding of the ways of lesser mortals.

The reading of even a few of Edwards' sermons, however, will serve to dispel any notions that he was coldly intellectual or rationalistic in his preaching. Let Edwards speak for himself:

> Was there ever an age wherein strength and penetration of reason, extent of learning, exactness of distinction, correctness of style, and clearness of expression did not so abound? And yet, was there ever an age wherein there has been so little sense of the evil of sin, so little love to God, heavenly mindedness and holiness of life among the professors of true religion? Our people do not so much need to have their heads stored as to have their hearts touched; and they stand in the greatest need of that sort of preaching that has the greatest tendency to do this.[20]

These words penned in 1742 take us to the heart of Edwards' preaching. His goal was, by the blessing of the Spirit of God, to touch the "religious

affections", that faculty, in Edwards' terminology, which combined the emotions and the will. This is an essential element of his view of preaching:

> I think an exceedingly *affectionate* way of preaching about the great things of religion has in itself no tendency to beget false apprehensions of them; but, on the contrary, a much greater tendency to beget true apprehensions of them than a moderate, dull, indifferent way of speaking of them.[21]

Great emotion ("affection"), if it is unforced and appropriate to the subject, is proper in preaching. Hence he says,

> If the subject be in its own nature worthy of very great affection, then a speaking of it with very great affection is most agreeable to the nature of that subject, or is the truest representation of it, and therefore has most of a tendency to beget true ideas of it in the minds of those to whom the representation is made.[22]

Even bodily movements and crying out are not to be despised if they are tokens of the impact of the Word of God on the hearers. At all times Edwards seeks to hold together reason, emotion and will. Hence he can write,

> I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as I possibly can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with.[23]

Some have suggested that Edwards read his sermons slavishly from the manuscripts which he wrote out so carefully. Even the Enfield preaching of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" was said to have been a close reading of the manuscript. What is the truth of the matter? Noting that Solomon Stoddard advised against the use of notes, George Marsden's view is that Edwards was more comfortable writing his sermons. He concludes, "Although he practically memorized his sermons, not until late in his career could he manage to abandon writing them out in precise detail and having the security of the text in front of him".[24] Iain Murray argues strongly against the view that Edwards read his sermons closely. He cites the views of Stoddard and states that even Edwards' early preaching, when Edwards referred to "lively appreciation of the Word", does not fit this view. Furthermore Edwards' notes for his Northampton sermons are contained in small palm-sized notebooks which lent themselves to occasional reference and would be almost invisible to the congregation. Indeed from 1741 onwards Edwards gave up his practice of writing his sermons in detail. There are in fact no eyewitness accounts of Edwards reading a sermon and only later was it claimed that the Enfield sermon was read, even though the surviving notes are not in harmony with this view. Murray concludes, it seems convincingly,

> What probably happened was that Edwards for some twenty years took his full manuscript into the pulpit. He never read it word for word and he gradually became less dependent on it. Then, for an intermediate period, he continued to write at some length but took only a brief skeleton – "thumb papers" as the East Windsor people called them – into the pulpit with him. Finally he ceased to write in full and prepared only an extended outline.[25]

2. Some representative sermons analysed

Having considered some fundamental elements of Edwards' approach to preaching, in the second part of this study we will consider several of Edwards' sermons from the point of view of both form and content. These sermons have not been selected at random: they represent several significant strands in Edwards' preaching. They will demonstrate that Edwards was not chiefly or exclusively a preacher of judgment and hell, important as both themes were to him, but that he preached often on the glories of Christ and the consolations of the gospel. Consideration of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" will also serve to correct some common misunderstandings of Edwards' powerful exposition.

(i) God's Sovereignty in the Salvation of Men: Romans 9:18[26]

Indications are that this sermon was preached some time between August 1731 and December 1732. In the introductory section of the sermon Edwards presents the necessary context for verse 18, namely Paul's concern for the spiritual welfare of the Jews and, more immediately, the distinction between Jacob and Esau established by God's electing decree. This leads Edwards to two preliminary observations regarding his text:

> God's different dealing with men
> The foundation of his different dealing with mankind: viz his sovereign will and pleasure.

This leads to the crucial first step in constructing the sermon proper, namely the statement of the sermon's theme: "*Doctrine*. God exercises his sovereignty in the eternal salvation of men".[27] Edwards expands this statement thus:

> He *not* only is sovereign, and has a sovereign right to dispose and order in that affair; and he not only might proceed in a sovereign way, if he would, and nobody could charge him with exceeding his right; but he actually does so.[28]

The "Doctrine" section of the sermon is then developed under four

headings.

First Edwards considers "What is God's sovereignty", and provides the definition, "The sovereignty of God is his absolute, independent right of disposing of all creatures according to his own pleasure".[29] This is explicated further as Edwards indicates that the will of God is his "mere pleasure" in three respects: in opposition to any constraints, in opposition to its being under the will of another and in opposition to any proper obligation. Edwards stresses strongly that God's right to dispose of his creatures is absolute, unlimited and independent of any other influence or factor save God himself.

The second element of divine sovereignty considered by Edwards is "What God's sovereignty in the salvation of men implies". He summarises as follows:

> I observe, it implies that God can either bestow salvation on any of the children of men, or refuse it, without any prejudice to the glory of any of his attributes, except where he has been pleased to declare, that he will or will not bestow it.[30]

The exception to God's willingness to save which is singled out by Edwards is the category of those who have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit. Such people God has declared in Scripture he will not save. Aside from that exception, says Edwards, God may save any person without prejudice to any of his divine attributes. Indeed even his refusal to save those who have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit is a choice and not an externally-imposed restriction on God's part. Edwards goes on to demonstrate how God may save any without compromising his holiness, his justice, his majesty or his truth.

Another sub-section in effect mirrors these points as Edwards notes, "God may refuse salvation to any sinner whatsoever, without prejudice to any part of his glory". In particular Edwards refers to God's righteousness, his goodness and his faithfulness. This time there are no exceptions since God is under no obligation to save any.

Having established God's right to save any, Edwards under his third heading shows "That God does actually exercise his sovereignty in men's salvation". Several aspects of God's saving exercise of his sovereignty are then considered. Edwards notes, for example, that God may call one people or nation and give them means of grace whilst leaving others without. Israel under the old covenant is of course the prime example, as Romans 9 demonstrates. With the coming of the Messiah, Israel is rejected and the Gentiles are called. As Edwards concludes,

> That nation, that was so honoured of God, have now been for many ages rejected, and remain dispersed all over the world, a remarkable monument of divine vengeance. And now God greatly distinguishes some Gentile nations from others, and all according to his sovereign pleasure.[31]

Edwards goes on to consider how God saves particular individuals, how he sometimes saves the lowly rather than the wise and great, those who have few advantages and those who have lived particularly sinful lives. Some who seek salvation are saved, yet others are not.

In the fourth section Edwards offers two reasons for such an exercise of such sovereignty, both of a philosophical rather than an exegetical kind. First he suggests that God wills to manifest his glory in all his attributes and so he necessarily wills to be glorified in the exercise of sovereignty. In the second place Edwards argues that "The more excellent the creature is over whom God is sovereign, and the greater the matter in which he so appears, the more glorious is his sovereignty".[32] Although sovereignty over angels is most glorious, sovereignty over the soul of a noble creature such as man is also glorious.

Despite what was said earlier about the "Application" taking up around half of a sermon, in this case (at least in the printed version) it is relatively short. It may have been extended in delivery. Edwards begins with an exhortation to learn how absolutely dependent we are on God for salvation and then counsels humble adoration of such absolute sovereignty. "The absolute, universal, and unlimited sovereignty of God requires, that we should adore him with all possible humility and reverence".[33]

Edwards' third point of application counsels Christians to ascribe all the glory for their salvation to the sovereign God. It is a truth that should stir praise and thanksgiving. This ought, in the fourth place, to lead us to marvel at the grace of God which led him to bind himself in covenant with us, although he is absolutely free by nature. This encourages submission to God's sovereignty and, as a fifth point of application, protects us from the extremes of presumptions and discouragement regarding salvation.

(ii) Christ's Agony: Luke 22:44[34]

It appears that this sermon, which could not have been preached in its entirety on a single occasion, was preached in October 1739 and, consonant with Edwards' practice, repreached in the winter and spring of 1757. Having briefly established that the word "agony" in Luke 22:44 signifies "an earnest strife", Edwards sets out the two propositions which will shape the Doctrine sections of each of the two parts into which the sermon is divided. The propositions are as follows:

> I. That the soul of Christ in his agony in the garden had a sore conflict with those terrible and amazing views and apprehensions of which he was then the subject.
> II That the soul of Christ in his agony in the garden had a great and earnest labour and struggle with God in prayer.[35]

As he turns first to consider the "terrible and amazing views and apprehensions" which Christ had, Edwards notes that the cause of these views was the Saviour's suffering on the cross which would be endured the following day. Although Christ had understood from the outset of his public ministry what the end of his work would be, Edwards sees in Gethsemane Christ receiving an especially powerful view of what lay ahead. Edwards describes it vividly:

> A sense of that wrath that was to be poured out upon him, and of those amazing sufferings that he was to undergo, was strongly impressed on his mind by the immediate power of God; so that he had far more full and lively apprehensions of the bitterness of the cup which he was to drink than he ever had before, and these apprehensions were so terrible, that his feeble human nature shrunk at the sight, and was ready to sink.[36]

In similar vivid terms Edwards indicates that these apprehensions caused a great conflict in the soul of Christ which "was dreadful, beyond all expression or conception".[37] The language of darkness and fire which occurs often in Edwards' sermons warning sinners of the hell that awaits them if they do not repent is here applied to the sufferings of the Son of God who bore the pains of hell for his people. This leads Edwards to give prominence to the divine love revealed in Christ's willing sacrifice.

The Application section of the first part of the sermon is almost twice the length of the Doctrine section. He begins by asserting that from the description of what took place in Gethsemane "we may learn how dreadful Christ's last sufferings were"[38] since his contemplation of them had such a profound effect upon him. He devotes most attention, however, to Christ's agony as a demonstration of the power of his love for sinners. Such was his love that it was powerful enough to carry him through the agony of Gethsemane: "his sorrows abounded, but his love did much more abound".[39] More especially, Edwards says, the strength of Christ's love is seen in the fact that, having had such a clear view of the terribleness of the cup he was to drink, he did indeed drink it. A dimension of the hatefulness of the cup, according to Edwards, was the complete unworthiness of the sinners for whom Christ was to suffer. Indeed the death he was to die was itself a demonstration of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. His love triumphed nevertheless:

> But yet at the same time, so wonderful was the love of Christ to those who exhibited this hateful corruption, that he endured those very sufferings to deliver them from the punishment of that very corruption.[40]

By way of further application Edwards speaks of the wonderfulness of Christ's submission to the will of God, of the glory of Christ's obedience, and of "the sottishness of secure sinners in being so fearless of the wrath of God".[41]

The second part of the sermon places the focus on Christ's prayer in Gethsemane, Edwards chief point being "That the soul of Christ in his agony in the garden was in a great and earnest strife and conflict in his prayer to God".[42] Part of Christ's agony, according to Edwards, was his labouring in prayer, the word for "agony" in Luke 22:44 being used often in Scripture for wrestling with God in prayer.

Edwards begins by considering the nature of Christ's prayer and concludes that it was chiefly supplicatory: "this earnest prayer of Christ was of the nature of a supplication for some benefit or favour which Christ earnestly desired".[43] As far as the content of that supplication is concerned, Edwards admits that it is difficult to be sure, given the silence of the text, but drawing on other Scriptures he provides a possible view.

Negatively, this second prayer was not for the removal of the cup of suffering. Strengthened by the angel (v.44), Christ was now sure that the cup would not pass from him. In this regard Edwards cites Matthew's record of Jesus' submission to the Father, "thy will be done". Positively, Edwards argues, Christ's prayer was "that God's will might be done, in what related to his sufferings".[44] This embraces two requests: that he would be sustained in the doing of God's will in his sufferings and that his sufferings would have their designed redemptive effects in glorifying the grace of God and in providing salvation for the elect.

These supplications were offered by Christ in his capacity as High Priest, a fact indicated by Hebrews 5:6-7. The earnestness of the prayer Edwards explains in three ways: Christ's extraordinary sense of the dreadful consequences of failure, his awareness of the costliness of the means of salvation and his sense of dependence on God. Again citing Hebrews 5:7 ("He was heard in that he feared"), Edwards concludes the Doctrine section of this part of the sermon by affirming the success of Christ:

> He was enabled to do the whole will of God; and he obtained the whole of the end of his sufferings a full atonement for the sins of the whole world, and the full salvation of every one of those who were given him in the covenant of redemption, and all that glory to the name of God, which his mediation was designed to accomplish, not one jot or tittle hath failed.[45]

The second part of the sermon, which is in effect a profound study of Christ's intercessory ministry, is rounded off with seven points of application. Edwards mentions, for example, that Christ here teaches us how we should pray:

> Not in a cold and careless manner, but with great earnestness and engagedness of spirit, and especially when we are praying to God for those things that are of infinite importance, such as spiritual and eternal blessings.[46]

Edwards again stresses how Christ's actions show the greatness of his

love for sinners and how they provide sinners with great encouragement to come to him for salvation. There is comfort too for believers as they witness how he prayed for them. Most of the applications, indeed, centre on comfort and encouragement.

(iii) He That Believeth Shall Be Saved: Mark 16:15-16[47]

This sermon, preached in Stockbridge in 1751, is an example of Edwards' preaching to an Indian congregation. It is in fact two sermons, one preached in the morning, the second later in the day.

The entire morning sermon is given over to what, in his more usual pattern, Edwards would have designated the Doctrine, and it consists of only two headings. After a narrative introduction tracing the spread of true knowledge of God from after the Flood, through the public ministry of Christ, up to the present day, Edwards continues,

> This forenoon I shall speak from those words, "He that believeth shall be saved". And here I shall do two things: I shall first show what is meant by believing in Christ, and then will show how that believing in Christ is the way to be saved.[48]

Instead of the closely argued paragraphs of his Northampton sermons, Edwards provides numerous short, direct statements of what it means to believe in Christ, using various lines of approach and drawing on a variety of concrete experiences such as blindness and sickness. The theology is as orthodox and profound as it is in any of his sermons: the sinner's need and helplessness, the sufficiency of Christ for salvation and the magnitude of his love and mercy. The presentation, however, is clearly designed for hearers without a wide knowledge of Scripture. This is a typical example:

> If a sick man that is like to die don't know that he is dangerously sick, and thinks he is pretty well, he won't go with all his heart to the physician to cure him. They that believe in Christ, they see that they can't help themselves, that if Christ don't save 'em they must perish.[49]

Having established in very practical terms what it is to believe in Christ, Edwards goes on to explain how believing in Christ is necessary for salvation. He stresses repeatedly the uniqueness of Christ as the way of salvation, the basis of this being that "Christ has suffered for us, and has satisfied for our sin, and has paid down a sufficient price for our salvation".[50]

In the second part of the sermon Edwards turns his attention to the truth that those who do not believe in Christ will be damned. In graphic language Edwards describes what it means to be damned, drawing on biblical imagery and on descriptions reflecting the experience of his Indian listeners:

> When they die and the soul goes out of the body, God will send no angels to take care of it, and he will let the devils take it. The devils will fly upon it like hungry bears and wolves, and shall carry the soul down into hell.[51]

Edwards holds out no hope for those who do not believe in Christ. The application consists of two points which both underline the evangelistic thrust of the sermon. By means of a series of very direct and personal questions he urges his hearers to examine themselves to see whether they truly believe in Christ. "Is your heart broken for your sin? And does your whole heart go to Christ, and him alone, as your Savior?"[52] In the second application he then urges them to come to Christ for salvation. "You may come and eat without money. Come for nothing. Christ has paid the price, and you may come for nothing".[53] The great theologian in the simplest of terms earnestly exhorts his Indian hearers to come to Christ. He could scarcely have made it clearer.

(iv) Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God: Deuteronomy 32:35[54]

Preached to little effect in his own Northampton congregation, this sermon was again preached by Edwards in Enfield, Connecticut, on 8th July, 1741, with amazing results, as the Spirit of God moved powerfully upon the congregation.

It must be noted at the outset that this is not in fact a "hellfire sermon", although Edwards did preach such sermons. Rather it is an "awakening sermon"[55] to use Kimnach's term. It was preached to people who had listened to many sermons, including sermons on the awful reality of hell, and who had remained unmoved. This sermon was Edwards' attempt, under God, to move them.

His focus is not on the terrible punishment awaiting the unrepentant, although that does figure in the sermon. He concentrates instead on the fact of death and, above all, on the impossibility of knowing when one will die. As Kimnach says, "This is eschatological realism, not the hellfire of conventional awakening sermons – even Edwards'."[56]

It is not the doctrine of "Sinners" that is noteworthy: it states truths that are to be found in any orthodox sermon on these issues. Rather it is the imagery Edwards employs which almost overwhelms the reader. He used extended imagery in previous sermons, but, as George Marsden says, "*Sinners* is so remarkable because Edwards employed so many images and addressed them so immediately to his hearers that they were left with no escape".[57]

The Doctrine part of the sermon, which takes up only one third of its length, is summed up in Edwards' initial statement, "There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of Hell, but the mere pleasure of God".[58] Having in his introduction indicated the significance of Deuteronomy

32:35 for Old Testament Israel, Edwards now concentrates on the wicked of his own day.

As he seeks to press home the lesson of how suddenly life may end, casting the unrepentant sinner into hell, he reminds his listeners first that God does not lack the power to cast the wicked into hell at any moment. Furthermore, since they deserve such punishment, God's justice is no obstacle to their being cast into hell, and on the basis of God's righteous law "they are bound over already to Hell".[59] Indeed, says Edwards,

> God is a great deal more angry with great numbers that are now on earth: yea, doubtless, with many that are now in this congregation, who it may be are at ease, than he is with many of those who are now in the flames of Hell.[60]

The devil is ready to seize them. Were it not for God's restraining hand the hellish principles already at work in sinners would immediately consume them. Edwards warns against complacency: "It is no security to wicked men for one moment, that there are no visible means of death at hand".[61] As men and women in the New England of the early eighteenth century ought to have known well, life was very uncertain and death could come suddenly from any of numerous directions. As Edwards goes on to remind his hearers, all the efforts of the wicked to avoid hell are futile. Edwards reinforces the point by imagining the despairing words of former church members who are now in hell:

> No, I never intended to come here: I had laid out matters otherwise in my mind; I had thought I should contrive well for myself... O, my cursed foolishness! I was flattering myself, and pleasing myself with vain dreams of what I would do hereafter.[62]

It is in the final doctrinal point that Edwards introduces the image which he will develop so powerfully by way of application: "then it is that natural men are held in the hand of God over the pit of Hell".[63] God, says Edwards, has not given any promise to keep any natural man out of hell for a moment.

The two thirds of the sermon taken up by Application drives home the lessons of the fragility of life and the closeness of descent into hell by means of a series of dramatic images. Sinners, for example, are heavy as lead: "and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf".[64] Alternatively, God's wrath "is like great waters that are dammed for the present: they increase more and more".[65] If God removes his restraining hand, "the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God would rush forth with inconceivable fury, and would come upon you with omnipotent power".[66] A third example:

> The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and

> justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood.[67]

Edwards then goes on to develop the image on account of which the sermon is most often remembered. It is best read in its entirety, but some sense of its power may be gained from extracts.

> The God that holds you over the pit of Hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked... You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince: and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to Hell last night.[68]

His hearers are confronted very starkly with their perilous condition:

> O sinner! consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed against you, as against many of the damned in Hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment.[69]

Edwards' hearers are indeed left with no escape as he describes the fierce and eternal wrath of the infinite God whose good pleasure alone allows them to live.

We must not lose sight of the fact that Edwards' goal in preaching such a sermon is the salvation of his hearers, however. This is evident towards the close of the sermon as Edwards speaks of those already in torment longing for the opportunity which his hearers now enjoy. His concern for their welfare is clearly evident:

> And now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has thrown the door of mercy wide open, and stands in calling, and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners; a day wherein many are flocking to him, and pressing into the kingdom of God.[70]

Several times he stresses the numbers being saved and the horror of those who will see others being saved whilst they are lost. "How can you rest one moment in such a condition", asks Edwards, "Are not your souls as precious as the souls of the people of Suffield, where they are flocking from day to day to Christ?"[71] All age groups are addressed, especially young men and women,

and Edwards concludes with the call, "Therefore, let every one that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come".[72] In Enfield, by God's grace, many did.

(v) Heaven a World of Charity, or Divine Love: I Corinthians 13:8-10[73]

This is the sixteenth and final sermon of a series preached by Edwards in 1738 on I Corinthians 13 and first published by his descendant Tryon Edwards in 1851 as *Charity and Its Fruits*. It provides an example of Edwards' preaching on Heaven – a subject he often addressed – and serves to show that his preaching was not dominated by threats of judgment and depictions of hell. Edwards preached on the latter subjects because they are addressed in Scripture and his hearers needed to be told about them. He also delighted, however, in speaking about Heaven, often waxing lyrical about the joys to be expected in Heaven by the redeemed. Indeed his warnings about hell had the goal of directing people towards the delights of Heaven. Edwards' God is an angry God and equally well a God of love and mercy.

In opening up I Corinthians 13:8-10 Edwards notes first that, in his opinion, Paul has in view both the present state of the church, where miracles and revelations have ceased, and also the final state of the church, "when that which is perfect is come". From the text he then draws the Doctrine for the sermon: "Heaven is a world of charity or love".[74]

By means of six points Edwards paints a vivid picture of the love that permeates every aspect of the life of Heaven. He begins with the source of that love:

> The cause and fountain of love in heaven: The God of love Himself dwells in heaven. Heaven is the palace or presence-chamber of the high and holy One, whose name is love, and who is both the cause and source of all holy love.[75]

God's glorious presence fills Heaven with love. As far as the objects of that love are concerned, they will be perfectly lovely, with no pollution due to sin, and also "in heaven shall be all those objects that the saints have set their hearts upon, and which they have loved above all things in this world",[76] including parents, wives, children and friends who are in Christ:

> There will be the infant whom we have lost here below, through grace to be found above; there will be the Christian father, mother, wife, child, and friend, with whom we shall renew the holy fellowship of the saints that was interrupted by death here, but will be commenced again in the upper sanctuary, and then shall never end.[77]

All the saints will be there and, above all, the Triune God.
In Heaven the love of God is expressed within God's own Trinitarian

being, says Edwards, and it then flows out to saints and angels, who in turn love God with a supreme love and also love one another: "Not a heart is there that is not full of love, and not a solitary inhabitant that is not beloved by all the others".[78] The love of Heaven is holy and spiritual, directed by holy motives towards pure ends, namely "God's glory and the happiness of the universe".[79] That love is also perfect in degree, infinitely so in the case of God. Envy, enmity, and coldness will be gone from among the saints. Love in Heaven will always be mutual, fully reciprocated. The saints will delight in God's love for them in Christ and will return that love: "the sight of His love will ... the more fill them with joy and admiration, and love for Him".[80]

Edwards reviews many characteristics of the love of Heaven as the sermon unfolds: there will be no jealousy to dampen love; there will be no hindrances to the expression of love; it will always be expressed with perfect decency and wisdom; there will be nothing in Heaven to keep the saints at a distance from one another, whether physical, emotional or spiritual. The absence of trials will also contribute to the enjoyment of mutual love. Edwards piles up images to try to convey this glorious world of love:

> Every saint in heaven is as a flower in that garden of God; and holy love is the fragrance and sweet odor that they all send forth, and with which they fill the bowers of that paradise above. Every soul there is as a note in some concert of delightful music that sweetly harmonizes with every other note, and all together blend in the most rapturous strains in praising God and the Lamb forever.[81]

The application is divided into four "Uses". First is the Use of Information, in which Edwards warns how strife and contention dull Christians' sense of heavenly things. The Use of Comfort underlines the happiness of those entitled to Heaven and here Edwards takes the opportunity to stress that it is those who love God and holiness who are so entitled. The evangelistic concern of Edwards comes to the fore in the Use of Awakening where the miseries awaiting the impenitent are described.

Edwards' concern, however, is positive and he concludes with a Use of Exhortation. Here he seeks to stir believers to seek heaven earnestly. "If heaven is such a blessed world, then let it be our chosen country, and the inheritance that we look for and seek".[82] The delights he has described ought to make us thirst for the enjoyment of such a place. He provides practical directions for seeking heaven, such as "do not let your heart go after the things of this world as your chief good", "be content to pass through all difficulties on the way to heaven", and "in all your ways let your eye be fixed on Jesus, who has gone to heaven as your Forerunner".[83] Edwards' own delight at the prospect of heaven is clear as he concludes,

> Happy, thrice happy, are those who shall thus be found faithful to the end, and then shall be welcomed to the joy of their Lord![84]

Notes

1. C. Angold, *A Literary History of the American People* (1931), quoted by Michael D. McMullan (ed), *The Glory and Honor of God. Volume 2 of the Previously Unpublished Sermons of Jonathan Edwards* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2004), p.6.
2. G. Godwin, *The Great Revivalists* (1950), quoted by Michael D. McMullan, op.cit., p.6.
3. Quoted by Michael D. McMullan, op.cit., p.4.
4. William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying With The Calling of the Ministry* (Edinburgh and Carlisle PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996).
5. William Perkins, *Art*, p.48.
6. William Perkins, *Art*, p.54.
7. Wilson H. Kimnach, "Edwards as preacher" in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, edited by Stephen J. Stein, (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 2007).
8. Wilson H. Kimnach, "Edwards as preacher", p.104.
9. "The False Hopes of Many Professing Believers" in *The Puritan Pulpit. Solomon Stoddard 1643-1729*, compiled and edited by Dr. Don Kistler (Orlando: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), pp.90-108.
10. Wilson H. Kimnach, "The Sermons: Concept and Execution" in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, edited by Sang Hyun Lee, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), p.245.
11. George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards. A Life*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), pp.54-5.
12. George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, p.98.
13. "Much in Deeds of Charity" (1741) in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards. A Reader*, edited by Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema and Douglas A. Sweeney (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p.205.
14. *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls, in Northampton, and the Neighbouring Towns and Villages of New Hampshire, in New England* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, revised and corrected by Edward Hickman, 1834 edition (Edinburgh and Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 1.344ff.
15. *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God, Applied to that Uncommon Operation that has Lately Appeared on the Minds of Many of the People of New England* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2.257ff.
16. Wilson H. Kimnach, "Edwards as Preacher", p.117.
17. Wilson H. Kimnach, "Edwards as Preacher", p.114.
18. Wilson H. Kimnach, "The Sermons: Concept and Execution", p.245.
19. George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, p.91.
20. Jonathan Edwards, *Thoughts on the New England Revival* (Edinburgh and Carlisle PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), p.118.
21. Jonathan Edwards, *Thoughts on the New England Revival*, p.116.
22. Jonathan Edwards, *Thoughts on the New England Revival*, p.117.
23. Jonathan Edwards, *Thoughts on the New England Revival*, p.117.
24. George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, p.119.
25. Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards. A New Biography*, (Edinburgh and Carlisle PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), p.190.
26. Jonathan Edwards, "God's Sovereignty in the Salvation of Men" in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2.849-54. References are to the two volume Hickman edition since it is the most readily available source of Edwards' works.
27. Edwards, "God's Sovereignty", p.850.
28. Edwards, "God's Sovereignty", p.850.
29. Edwards, "God's Sovereignty", p.850.

30. Edwards, "God's Sovereignty", p.850.
31. Edwards, "God's Sovereignty", p.852.
32. Edwards, "God's Sovereignty", p.853.
33. Edwards, "God's Sovereignty", p.854.
34. Jonathan Edwards, "Christ's Agony", in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2.866-77.
35. Edwards, "Christ's Agony", p.867.
36. Edwards, "Christ's Agony", p.867.
37. Edwards, "Christ's Agony", p.868.
38. Edwards, "Christ's Agony", p.869.
39. Edwards, "Christ's Agony", p.869.
40. Edwards, "Christ's Agony", p.870.
41. Edwards, "Christ's Agony", p.871.
42. Edwards, "Christ's Agony", p.872.
43. Edwards, "Christ's Agony", p.872.
44. Edwards, "Christ's Agony", p.873.
45. Edwards, "Christ's Agony", p.874.
46. Edwards, "Christ's Agony", p.875.
47. Jonathan Edwards, "He That Believeth Shall Be Saved" in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards. A Reader*, pp.111-20.
48. Edwards, "He That Believeth", p.112.
49. Edwards, "He That Believeth", p.113.
50. Edwards, "He That Believeth", p.114.
51. Edwards, "He That Believeth", p.117.
52. Edwards, "He That Believeth", p.119.
53. Edwards, "He That Believeth", p.120.
54. Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God", in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2.7-12.
55. Wilson H. Kimnach, "Edwards as Preacher", p.116.
56. Wilson H. Kimnach, "Edwards as Preacher", p.117.
57. George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, p.222.
58. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands", p.7.
59. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands", p.8.
60. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands", p.8.
61. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands", p.8.
62. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands", p.9.
63. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands", p.9.
64. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands", p.9.
65. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands", p.9.
66. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands", p.9.
67. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands", p.9.
68. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands", p.10.
69. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands", p.10.
70. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands", p.11.
71. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands", p.11.
72. Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands", p.12.
73. Jonathan Edwards, "Heaven a World of Charity, or Divine Love" in *Charity and its Fruits*, edited by Dr. Don Kistler (Orlando FL: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), pp.285-326. The 1851 edition published by Tryon Edwards did not retain Edwards' style, though remaining faithful to his message. In this recent edition Edwards' original style has been restored, and it is therefore to be preferred.

74. Edwards, "Heaven", p.287.
75. Edwards, "Heaven", p.288.
76. Edwards, "Heaven", p.292.
77. Edwards, "Heaven", p.293.
78. Edwards, "Heaven", p.295.
79. Edwards, "Heaven", p.295.
80. Edwards, "Heaven", p.299.
81. Edwards, "Heaven", p.311.
82. Edwards, "Heaven", p.321.
83. Edwards, "Heaven", p.323-4.
84. Edwards, "Heaven", p.326.

'A SACRIFICE OF PRAISE'

Hebrew 13:15 - *"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that confess his name ".*

A. C. Gregg

Drew Gregg is a retired minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland who has served in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. He also taught at the Irish Bible School.

This article is concerned with our praise to God, specifically our praising of God in public worship. There are two main aspects to this subject. They relate to the *matter* and to the *manner* of our singing, to the "what" and "how" of our praising God in worship. There are four parts to the article: a brief introduction, the singing of psalms, the use of the voice, and a conclusion.

A. INTRODUCTION

Of fundamental importance to all aspects of the subject is the question of authority. It ought to be taken as read that it is for God to decree the fact and mode of his worship. That has application to every element of worship: to the reading and exposition of the Scriptures, to prayer, and to the rendering of praise. It is not for mere men to choose the content of their worship of God.

The divine authorization is set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. In the interpretation of the Bible, what has been called "the regulative principle" ought to be applied. In its simplest form the principle reads, "whatever is not commanded in the worship of God is forbidden." This principle is given in an expanded form in the Westminster Confession of Faith (Ch.XXI), as follows,

> the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.

The scriptural proofs include the following: Deuteronomy 12:32, "See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it"; and Matthew 15:9, "They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men".

Regarding the regulative principle Rev. M. C. Ramsay writes,

> The Churches' security against all forms of ritualistic worship, which is will-worship, is for the Churches to recognize that God has appointed how He is to be worshipped, and no one may add to or subtract from it. The unchanging word of God, and not popular opinion, nor the spirit of the age, constitutes the rule as to how we are to worship God. Therefore the application of this fundamental and all-inclusive principle safeguards scriptural worship. Without it the way is open to the influx of almost every conceivable device into worship[1].

B. THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Luke 20:42,43, "David himself declares in the Book of Psalms: 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'"

1. The command to sing Psalms

That the Psalms are designed to be sung in worship is made abundantly clear. The following three references are noteworthy:

2 Chronicles 29:30, "King Hezekiah and his officials ordered the Levites to praise the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness and bowed their heads and worshipped."

Psalm 47:7, "For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise."

Colossians 3: 16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

2. The Old Testament use of the Psalms

In Old Testament times there was the tabernacle or Tent of Meeting worship, the temple worship and the synagogue worship. If and when there was singing in these worship services the Psalms would have been used.

3. The New Testament use of the Psalms

Of the several relevant passages in the New Testament note the following two:

Matthew 26:30 (cf. Mark 14:26), "When they had sung a hymn, they

went out to the Mount of Olives." This was the occasion when Jesus and his disciples were observing the Passover feast. At a certain point in the celebration Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. The practice of the Jews was to sing Psalms 113 to 118 in portions during the Passover observance. Commentators are agreed that Jesus and his disciples sang from these psalms - the Great Hallel- at this time.

Ephesians 5:19 (cf. Colossians 3:16), "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord." The Ephesian (and Colossian) Christians were familiar with the Greek translation of the Old Testament. During the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285 - 246 BC) the Law section of this version had been translated by 72 scholars and consequently, when the whole work was completed, it was called (somewhat inaccurately) the "Septuagint" (LXX for short). In this translation of the Book of Psalms, 67 have the title "psalms", 36 are labelled "songs" and a smaller number are called "hymns". Some are called a "psalm and a song" and the 76th bears all three titles, "a psalm, a hymn and a song". These praises are inspired by the Holy Spirit: the adjective "spiritual" should be seen as qualifying all three nouns. David claimed this inspiration when in his last words he said, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2). As people sing the psalms of David "the word of Christ" dwells in them richly (Colossians 3:16).

Other relevant New Testament passages are Acts 16:25, 1 Corinthians 14:26, and James 5:13.

4. Other biblical songs

There are a number of songs of praise in the Old Testament outside the Book of Psalms, and others in the New Testament. In the Old Testament there are the songs of Moses, Deborah, Hannah, Hezekiah, Jonah, and Habakkuk. In the New Testament there are the songs of Mary and Simeon. Whilst these praises were inspired, they were sung by individual people on special occasions and were not necessarily meant to be used in the public worship of God. Those in the Old Testament were not included in the Book of Psalms and there is no praise book in the New Testament.

5. The Use of Psalms in the Early Church

Regarding the use of the psalms in history as a whole, it needs to be remembered that the testimony of history, while interesting and valuable, must be seen as providing no more than corroborating evidence. The fundamental

rule of faith and practice must always be: "What does the Scripture say?"

That the psalms were the manual of praise in the early Christian Church seems clear. The Council of Laodicea (c.360AD) forbade "the singing of uninspired hymns in the church". The Council of Chalcedon (451AD) confirmed this decree.

Writing on the great Augustine, Dr William Binnie said,

> In order that the people might sing with the understanding, Augustine bestowed much pains on the exposition of this part of Scripture. In his collected writings, a much larger space is devoted to the Psalter than to any other book of Scripture. He published in his life-time Enarrations, a kind of running commentary on all the Psalms; and of these the greater number were discourses actually delivered to Christian congregations. In introducing his Enarrations, the preacher would sometimes say, 'I have united with you, beloved, in singing this psalm; I beg that you now, in your turn, unite with me in applying your minds to a devout meditation upon it.' There is evidence that Augustine's expositions were listened to with breathless attention by great congregations. His Enarrations were much read and greatly prized for a thousand years; and indeed were only superseded by the exposition of the Reformers.[2]

6. The Use of Psalms in the Medieval Period

In his *Confessions*, Augustine could speak of the Psalms of David being "sung through the whole world". Yet, as early as the 2nd century, uninspired praises were being composed, though almost certainly they were used privately and socially rather than in public worship.

When heresies began to appear, they were often promoted by the use of non-biblical songs. Rev. Rowland S. Ward writes as follows,

Valentinus, a Gnostic who flourished at Rome AD 135-165, had written a few songs...It was Baidaisan of Syria (154-222), or his son, men tainted with Gnosticism, who went so far as to write 150 songs to replace the Psalter. Ephraem of Syria (c.306-373) found these songs such a menace that he composed orthodox hymns which could be sung to the same tunes in order to counteract the spread of Gnostic error.[3]

About 320 AD Arius of Alexandria, who denied the divinity of Christ, put his theological views into verse and he and his followers wrote other songs as they sought to attract the common people.

In time the Councils of the Church capitulated to the demand for the inclusion of hymns in public worship. As late as the Second Council of Braga,

Portugal (c.563), compositions outside the Scriptures were excluded. However, the Second Council of Tours, France (567), stated that the hymns of Ambrose were in use in the services and "nothing hinders us to repeat others whose authors are known." The Fourth Council of Toledo, Spain (633), defended the use in worship of uninspired praises.

At one level much attention was still given to the Psalms. In the early Church it was common for people to learn "the whole of David". As late as the Second Council of Nicea (787) it was decreed that a man could not become a bishop without knowing the Psalter by heart.

However, at another level all was not well. Pope Gregory (590-604) abolished congregational singing in favour of singing by professional choirs. These choirs sang the Psalms in Latin, a language that was increasingly falling into disuse. This singing by choirs in Latin, allied to a liturgical approach to worship, resulted in the common people becoming more and more ignorant of the Psalms, and indeed of the Bible as a whole. Through the influences of popes and Councils the Christian Church degenerated and during those Dark Ages there were few rays of spiritual light.

7. The Psalms in the Reformation Period

With the Reformation came the reintroduction of congregational singing and the restoration of the Psalms to the people in their own languages, as their manual of praise. The Word of God was given its rightful position, but there were inevitable differences in emphases among the Reformers.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) held that whatever was not explicitly forbidden in the Scriptures was permissible. Accordingly, he did not limit the matter of praise to the Psalms, although many Lutheran hymns were based on psalms. He believed in singing both by choirs and congregations.

John Calvin (1509-1564), unlike Luther, followed the regulative principle. In the preface to the 1542 service book, Calvin wrote,

> Now, what Augustine says is true, namely, that no one can sing anything worthy of God which he has not received from him. Therefore, even after we have carefully searched everywhere, we shall not find better or more appropriate songs to this end than the Psalms of David, inspired by the Holy Spirit. And for this reason, when we sing them we are assured that God puts the words in our mouth, as if he himself were singing through us to exalt his glory.[4]

It is true that Calvin allowed the use in praise of several Scripture

Canticles, especially the Song of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32).

John Knox (c.1514-1572) the Scottish Reformer wrote,

> All worshipping, honouring or service invented by the brain of man in the religion of God, without his own express commandment, is Idolatry...Disobedience to God's voice is not only when man doeth wickedly contrary to the precepts of God, but also when of good zeal or good intent...man doeth anything to the honour or service of God not commanded by the express Word of God.[5]

Knox's full acceptance of the principle of regulation resulted in commitment to exclusive psalmody in the reformed Scottish Church.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) prescribes the "singing of psalms with grace in the heart" (XXI.5). The Directory for the Public Worship of God (1645) states that, "It is the duty of Christians to praise God publickly, by singing of psalms together in the congregation, and also privately in the family."

Dr. Millar Patrick summarizes the attainments of the Reformation with regard to the Psalms as follows:

> ...at a stroke the Reformed Church cut loose from the entire mass of Latin hymns and from the use of hymnody in general, and adopted the Psalms of the Old Testament as the sole medium of Church praise.[6]

In the leaflet *What Hymn*?, issued by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, it is stated,

> With the coming of the Protestant Reformation, and the accompanying interest in returning to Biblical practices, there was a great and joyous return to the exclusive use of the Psalms in worship by the Reformed churches. John Calvin and John Knox, in the years of their public ministries, used nothing but the Psalms in worship. The Huguenots sang them generation after generation. The Waldenses sang them in their mountain homes in Italy. The Psalms were the battle hymns of the Covenanters as they fought for religious liberty in Scotland. The Puritans brought their **Ainsworth Psalm Books** with them to America. The first book to be printed in the English colonies was the **Bay Psalm Book.**

8. The Metrical Psalter

The Psalms are meant to be sung rather than only read or recited. There can be no objection to chanting as such, but it is a form of praise less suited to congregational participation. Dr. John Ker writes that "one benefit of (rhyme) is, that while the chant too frequently falls to trained specialists, the rhythmic song...remains oftener the possession of the entire body of the people."[7]

The singing of the psalms in metre finds its beginnings in the Reformation era. Calvin published a book in 1539 that contained seventeen metrical psalms, five by himself, together with metrical versions of Simeon's song and the Commandments. With Calvin's encouragement Claude Marot and Theodore Beza added to the number of these psalms. This Genevan or French Psalter was completed in 1562 and Goudimel provided tunes in four parts in 1565. There were over 100 metres and 123 tunes in this psalter. Dr. Ker writes of this psalter that,

> The excellence of the translations, the variety of the rhythm and the beauty of the melodies, gave to the version of Marot and Beza a wonderful popularity. In all the French-speaking countries it was the book of song, in the castle as well as the cottage, for recreation or at work, for the lady in the hall, the weaver at his loom, the peasant at the plough.[1]

Translations of these psalms were made into almost all the languages of Europe.

In 1555 an English-speaking congregation was formed at Geneva and John Knox was one of the pastors. The first Anglo-Genevan Psalter was published in 1556. Containing 51 psalms it became the parent of similar works in England and Scotland.

A publication known as the *Sternhold and Hopkins* Psalter was issued in 1562 and adopted as the metrical version for use in the Church of England. It went through numerous revisions before being replaced by the *Tate and Brady* version in 1696.

In 1564-65 the *Sternhold and Hopkins* Psalter was adopted by the Church of Scotland, 41 of the 150 translations being different from those in the English book. In this First or Old Scottish Psalter, 98 psalms were set to common metre, 10 to long metre, 6 to short metre and 4 to long metres of six lines. There were 26 metres for the other 32 psalms. In 1643 the Westminster Divines began to give attention to compiling a new metrical version of the psalms. The edition of Francis Rous was chosen as the basis for the proposed new Psalter. Following revision work by the Westminster Divines and further revision by the Church of Scotland, it was finally approved in 1649 and appointed for use as from 1st May, 1650. This Second Scottish Psalter was entirely in common metre with 13 non-common metre alternative versions. A selection of 12 tunes was published in 1666 and few others were used for a century.

The 1650 Psalter has been the praise book of the Reformed Churches in much of the English-speaking world up until comparatively recent times. The Church of Scotland published a modest revision in 1869 and the Irish Presbyterian Church followed with a similar revision in 1880.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (RPCI) prepared and printed a new edition in 1957. The Preface states that,

> It consists of the Psalter in Metre (1899), with Supplement (1924) prepared by the United Original Secession Church of Scotland, to which are now added alternative Psalm-versions with tunes taken from the Revised Psalter of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and a further selection of tunes inserted in the Supplement.

The RPCI published another revision of *The Psalms in Metre* in 1979, which included about 80 alternative versions. Its Preface states that,

> It is based on the Psalms in Metre (1957) of this Church, to which are now added alternative versions with tunes taken from the Book of Psalms of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (1950 and 1973 editions) and a further selection of tunes inserted in the Supplement.

A more radical revision of the Psalter was issued by the RPCI in 2004. In it every one of the 150 psalms has a new version. The main sources used in the work of revision were the

> Hebrew interlinear text, the New American Standard Version and the New International Version, together with the past and current Psalters of the R. P. Church of Ireland and the R. P. Church of North America, and the revised versions of the Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia.

The aim was to have an accurate translation of the original in which the meaning would be readily understood. New tunes with new metres were incorporated and unused tunes deleted. *The Psalms for Singing - A 21st Century Edition* does not break completely with the past because a number of well-loved Scottish Metrical versions have been retained side by side with the revisions.

9. The Introduction of Hymns

It was almost the 18th century before non-inspired praises were introduced into public worship. Benjamin Keach, a Baptist pastor, introduced hymns and published his first hymnbook in 1676. Isaac Watts, an Independent minister, published his *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* in 1707. The singing of hymns was an important feature of the Methodist movement, Charles Wesley alone having composed 6,500 hymns. The first Methodist hymnbook was issued in Georgia in 1737 and other editions followed.

The Anglican William Romaine, who was a contemporary of the hymn-writers John Newton and William Cowper, wrote in 1775,

> ...our hymn-mongers...shut out the Psalms, to introduce their own verses into the Church, sing them with great delight, and, as they fancy, with great profit, although the practice be in direct opposition to the command of God, and, therefore, cannot possibly be accompanied with the divine blessing.

In 1781 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland decided to "permit" the use of Paraphrases. Hymns were not authorised by this Church until 1861. It was in that same year that Anglicans began to use hymns to a notable extent with the publication of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland co-operated with churches in Scotland and elsewhere in the world in publishing a hymnbook in 1898.

Thus it was not until almost the 18th century that hymns were used at all in public worship. It was late in the 19th century before hymns were used widely in Reformed Churches. It was even into the 20th century before hymns began replacing the Book of Psalms in a widespread way.

10. The Adequacy of the Psalms

When the psalms of the Bible are replaced wholly or partially or even supplemented by other compositions there is at least the implication that the Book of Psalms is somehow inadequate for praise in the New Testament Church. Some writers have gone further and declared that some of the psalms are unsuitable for worship in this dispensation.

Isaac Watts in 1707 maintained that some of the psalms were "almost opposite to the spirit of the Gospel". In *The Psalms of David Imitated* (1719), in which Watts paraphrased the psalms proposing to make David speak like a Christian, he omitted twelve psalms as "unworthy of paraphrase". Dr. Millar Patrick wrote in 1927,

> The ideas in many of (the psalms) our Lord made obsolete; the temper in some is quite definitely unchristian; there are whole psalms, and there are portions of others, which Christian lips should never utter in the presence of God.[10]

It is of course the so-called "imprecatory" or cursing psalms that are seen as presenting the chief difficulty. Even the highly respected Christian author C. S. Lewis wrote disparagingly of one of those psalms, the 137th. But there are times in the experience of the individual Christian, the Church and the nation when those psalms come into their own. Rev J. H. Webster rightly says,

> When all is quiet and peaceful the Church may not feel very often or keenly the need of these so-called imprecatory songs,...but when the shock of a great battle for the truth and with implacable enemies is upon her, when the storms of persecution rage, when her foes beset her round on every side, when earthly hope vanishes and her faith is tried as by fire, then she turns to these Psalms. They may have been stumbling-blocks to her faith in her prosperity, but they prove stepping-stones heavenward in her adversity, because in them the Judge of all the earth assures her of the ultimate destruction of her enemies and the complete and everlasting triumph of her cause.[11]

The simple truth is that the Psalms (all of them) are adequate for Christian worship. Christ himself declared that it was written about him in the Psalms (Luke 24:44). In the Psalms Christ is presented as the Son of God (2:7), as the Son of Man (8:4), as Prophet (40:9,10), as Priest (40:6,7), and as King (110:1; 45:6). There is set forth his Death (22:1ff), his Resurrection (16:8-11), his Ascension (68:18), his Second Coming (50:3-6), and indeed much more.

There is the fact of the very extensive use of the Psalms in the New Testament. It has been said that of the 243 quotations from the Old Testament found in the New, no fewer than 116 - almost the half - are from the Book of Psalms. Bishop Alexander, in his *Witness of the Psalms,* says that, as the result of a careful examination, reference is made to the Book of Psalms, either by quotation or otherwise, in no fewer than 286 passages of the New Testament.

Certainly Athanasius of Alexandria (293-373) was persuaded of the suitability of the Psalms for Christian worship. He wrote,

> In this book you find the whole life of man pictured, the moods of the heart, the movements of the thought. If you have need of repentance, if you have trial and temptation, if you are exposed to persecution and calumny, in all, and in every case, you can find here instruction, and bring your case before God in the words of the Psalms.[12]

The leaflet *What Hymn?,* issued by the RPCNA, is right in stating that,

> There is abundant reason for us to sing the Psalms in the worship of God. God, by His Holy Spirit, inspired them and commanded their use. Our Lord sang them, as the songs that met His need on that night in which He was betrayed. The Apostle Paul, under the Holy Spirit's guidance, directed congregations of the early church to use them. In later centuries the church, in its periods of greatest purity, has rejoiced to use the Psalms as its songs of praise.

C. "THE FRUIT OF LIPS"

Hebrews 13:15, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that confess his name."

Having considered the matter of our praise - The Book of Psalms - we now turn to the manner of our praise – "the fruit of lips"; from the *what* to the *how* of our praise of God in worship.

1. The Use of the Voice

The Bible speaks of praising God with the "lips", the "mouth", the "tongue", and the "voice".

Hosea 14:2, "Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him: 'Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips.'"

Psalm 66:17, "I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue."

Psalm 142:1, "I cry aloud to the Lord; I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy."

2. Instruments in the Old Testament

There were three different types of corporate worship in Old Testament times, the tabernacle or Tent of Meeting worship, the temple worship, and the synagogue worship.

(a) The tabernacle or Tent of Meeting worship

In connection with this worship God authorised the use of silver trumpets (Numbers 10:1-10). These trumpets were used to call the people together for worship and were, in effect, the church bells of the ancient church.

(b) The temple worship

In the later days of the tabernacle or Tent of Meeting worship, instruments were introduced into the worship. This change came about because it "was commanded by the Lord through his prophets" (2 Chronicles 29:25b), and was in preparation for the temple worship. The temple was built during the time of David's son, Solomon. Musical instruments were used in connection with the temple service. The Levites had cymbals, harps and lyres and the priests had trumpets (2 Chronicles 29:25, 26). The temple worship was unique, elaborate, figurative, related to the sacrificial ritual, and temporary.

(c) The synagogue worship

The Jews who lived at a distance from Jerusalem attended the temple no more than three times each year. Their normal Sabbath by Sabbath worship was in the local synagogue. In the simple synagogue worship no musical instruments were employed.

3. The New Testament Practice

The New Testament worship was patterned after the synagogue service.

No command was given to use instruments and there is no example of their being used. When Jesus and his disciples sang the Great Hallel (Matthew 26:30), and when the believers in Ephesus and Colossae sang their spiritual psalms, hymns and songs (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), there was no suggestion of this singing being accompanied by instrumental music. What was expressly commanded in the New Testament was "the fruit of lips".

4. The Early Church

The consistent testimony of leaders in the early centuries of the Christian Church was against the use of instruments in worship. Clement of Alexandria (c.150-215), who opposed the Gnostic error, wrote,

> We make use only of one organ or instrument, even the peaceful Word, with which we honour God; no longer with the old psaltery, trumpet, drum, cymbal, or pipe.[13]

Cyprian (c.200-258) the Bishop of Carthage, explained that instruments were permitted in Old Testament times "for the sake of their weakness, to stir up their minds to perform their external worship with some delight."[14]

John Chrysostom (c.347-407), the Bishop of Constantinople, held that instruments had been "permitted to the Jews, as sacrifice was, for the heaviness and grossness of their souls". Now in New Testament times we are to "use our bodies to praise Him withal." Instruments "appertain not to Christians; these are alien to the Catholic Church."[15]

The Church Father Isidore of Pelusium (c.360-440) maintained that it was because of the "childishness" of the Old Testament believers that they were allowed "to offer sacrifices" and "that music which is performed by the harp and psaltery".[16]

Rowland S. Ward writes that, in the early Church,

> the normal way in which the instruments associated with the Old Testament worship were explained was to see them as serving a typical function which was fulfilled in the New Testament church by the consecration of every faculty to the service of God.[17]

5. The Medieval Period

The organ was used by churches in Spain as early as 450 AD, but probably only for singing classes and not in public worship. It was not until the 7th century that Pope Vitalian (657-672) introduced the organ to churches in Rome. An organ was used at Malmesbury, England, in the 8th century and instruments were introduced into Ireland in the 9th century. An organ was used

at a service in Dunfermline, Scotland, in 1250.

Ward writes that,

> Instrumental music in worship was gradually introduced becoming quite common by 1400 or so. By the time of the Reformation (1517 onwards) it had monopolized the service in the more important centres so that vocal praise was subservient to the art of the musician.[18]

As the use of instruments became more prevalent even some Roman Catholic leaders began to express concern. Notably the theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) declared,

> In the old law, God was praised both with musical instruments and human voices. But the Church does not use musical instruments lest she should seem to Judaize. Nor ought a pipe, nor any other artificial instruments, such as organ, or harp, or the like, be brought into use in the Christian Church, but only those things which shall make the hearers better men. Under the Old Testament such instruments were used, partly because the people were harder and more carnal, and partly because these bodily instruments were typical of something.[19]

The scholar and humanist Desiderius Erasmus (1467-1536) wrote,

> We have brought a cumbersome and theatrical music into our churches. Men run to church as to a theatre to have their ears tickled. And for this end, organ-makers are hired with great salaries, and a company of boys who waste all their time in learning these tones.[20]

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) actually considered banning instrumental music, but in the end did not do so. A number of synods of the Roman church passed measures against the excessive use of musical instruments in the churches, one of these synods (Thorn) being as late as 1600.

6. The Reformation Period

There were earlier leaders, like Jerome (c.345-420) and Reformers such as Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) and Johann Heinrich Bullinger (15041575), who were opposed to instrumental music. But these men were also against vocal praise in worship. They were concerned about "the danger of being entertained by the charms of the melody rather than being edified by the words."[21]

Martin Luther, on the other hand, was committed firmly to the restoration of singing by congregations as well as by choirs. On the question of the use of instruments, there is some uncertainty about Luther's position. He was gravely concerned about the prevailing abuses but, because of his approach to

Scripture, his own taste as a musical person, and the circumstances under which he laboured, he did not wish, or was not able, to ban instruments entirely.

John Calvin (1509-1564) held that instrumental music was abolished with the temple and the ceremonial law. He said,

> Instrumental music is not fitter to be adopted into the public worship of the Christian Church than the incense, the candlestick, and the shadows of the Mosaic law.[22]

John Knox (c.1514-1572) saw that the consistent application of the regulation principle "not only purified the Church of human inventions and Popish corruptions, but restored plain singing of Psalms, unaccompanied by Instrumental Music."[23]

The Westminster Divines did not need to give attention to the matter of instrumental music because "in May 1644. Parliament ordered organs to be taken out of all churches." The Scottish Commissioners at the Assembly were able to report to their own General Assembly on 20th May, 1644, that "the great organs at Paul's and Peter's at Westminster (had been) taken down." The Westminster Directory for Public Worship (1645) states that,

> In singing of psalms, the voice is to be tunably and gravely ordered; but the chief care must be to sing with understanding, and with grace in the heart, making melody to the Lord.

The attainments during the Reformation period meant that the singing of unaccompanied metrical psalms became the norm, at least in the reformed Scottish Church.

7. The Introduction of Instruments

In the post-Reformation era musical instruments were gradually introduced into many churches, but not at as early a date as might be imagined. Hymn-singing was long in vogue before the employment of instruments became widespread. This is well illustrated in the case of Methodists and Baptists.

John Wesley (1703-1791) declared, "I have no objection to instruments being in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen."[24] The Methodist Conference of 1780 said, "Let no organs be placed anywhere till proposed in Conference." As late as 1808 the Conference refused for the future to "sanction or consent to the erection of any organs in our chapels" and decreed that where they already existed they were not to "overpower or supersede" the congregational singing. The general use of organs among British Methodists belongs to the 1830s and later.

C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) expressed his strong opposition to instruments in the following terms,

> We should like to see all the pipes of the organs in our Nonconformist places of worship either ripped open or compactly filled with concrete. The human voice is so transcendently superior to all that wind or strings can accomplish, that it is a shame to degrade its harmonies by association with blowing and scraping. It is not better music which we get from organs and viols, but inferior sounds, which unsophisticated ears judge to be harsh and meaningless when compared with a melodious human voice. That the great Lord cares to be praised by bellows we very gravely question; we cannot see any connection between the glory of God and sounds produced by machinery. One broken note from a grateful heart must have more real acceptable praise in it than all the wind which swept through whistling pipes. Instrumental music, with its flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of noise makers, was no doubt well suited to the worship of the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar, the king, had set up, and harps and trumpets served well the infant estate of the Church under the law, but in the Gospel's spiritual domain these may well be let go with all the other beggarly elements. What a degradation to supplant the intelligent song of the whole congregation by the theatrical prettiness of a quartette, the refined niceties of a choir or the blowing of wind from inanimate bellows and pipes. We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it.[25]

A precentor led the singing in Spurgeon's 4,600 seat Tabernacle. A piano was not introduced until 1912 and an organ until 1930.

As would be expected, Presbyterian denominations were not among the first to introduce instruments. In the Irish Presbyterian Church the issue was debated over the period 1868 to 1886 and was finally dropped by the General Assembly in 1892. The stalwart Dr. Henry Cooke (1788-1868) expressed the view that,

> It was an organic, a fundamental law of this church, that the praises of the Lord should be sung without the accompaniment of instrumental music, and it could not be altered.[26]

Nevertheless, altered it was, in time, and that in spite of the opposition of Cooke and other Irish Presbyterians such as Prof. William D. Killen (1806-1902) who said,

> The worship of the synagogue was more simple. Its officers did not introduce Instrumental Music into the congregational services. The early Christians followed the example of the synagogue; and when they celebrated the praise of God in Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs, their melody was the fruit of their lips. For many centuries after this period, the use of Instrumental Music was unknown in the Church...In the Church, as well as in the synagogue, the whole congregation joined in the singing; but Instrumental Music was never brought into requisition. The early Christians believed that the organs of the human voice

> were the most appropriate vehicles for giving utterance to the feelings of devotion; and, viewing the lute and the harp as the cardinal ordinances of a superannuated dispensation, they rejected their aid in the service of the sanctuary.[27]

Given the virtual obsession of so many churches, including Presbyterian ones, with instrumental music at the beginning of the 21st century, it is hard for many ordinary members in churches to realise that the use of instruments at all in worship is a relatively recent innovation.

D. CONCLUSION

No useful purpose is served by criticising adversely the contents of hymn-books. Some hymns present biblical truth accurately, whilst others are seriously flawed. There are good hymns and there are poor hymns, just as there are good secular poems and poor secular poems.

Furthermore, there are occasions when hymns may be used quite legitimately. A hymn may be used in a social gathering. People may sing a hymn in their private devotions. Preachers sometimes quote a hymn in the same way as they quote prose in order to illustrate and clarify a particular truth. We can say that hymns may legitimately be composed, read, studied, quoted, recited, listened to, and, in some circumstances, sung.

Regarding instruments, Rev. M. C. Ramsay says that,

> Instrumental music, as an art, is common to all peoples civilised and uncivilised. Throughout the whole of human history it has been practised. In itself it is good.[28]

At least it can be good, though, as with hymns, there can be good music and there can be poor music.

The question at issue both with regard to the matter and to the manner of praise is what is appropriate for inclusion in the public worship of God. It is surely clear that the biblical position is that the Book of Psalms alone ought to be sung in churches and that these praises should be rendered without instrumental accompaniment.

There have been occasions when psalm-singing and even psalm-singing people have been criticised unfairly. To complain that earlier Psalters "were almost entirely in common metre, involved convoluted phrasing to obtain rhyme, were characterised by faults in scansion, and were generally sung at a very slow pace"[29] (however true) is not a legitimate argument against exclusive psalmody.

Rev. D. C. Shelton has written that some psalm-singing churches "at times appear backward in missionary enterprise, legalistic to the extreme, traditionalist rather than Reformed," and "one can sing only psalms, have no

instruments and adopt a particular posture in prayer and yet not worship in spirit, because strife, envy, pride and an unforgiving spirit may prevail."[30] Some, or even much, of this may (sadly) at times be true but it hasn't anything to do with whether it is right or wrong to use the psalms exclusively in worship.

Psalm-singing Churches, however, should accept all legitimate challenges to their position. In the leaflet *Why No Organ?*, published by the RPCNA, it is admitted that there is "some a cappella congregational singing that sounds so bad it can't possibly be honouring to Christ". But it goes on to point out that "if a piano or an organ only covers up bad sounds, or fills in where there's silence, the Lord isn't deceived." We should be doing all we can to improve the service of praise on Scriptural lines. On the subject of music, Dr. J. Boyd Tweed says,

> The human voice is the finest musical instrument that has ever been made. In most cases it needs to be trained. If the time, effort and money spent by the churches on musical instruments were devoted to the cultivation of the voice, congregational singing would be greatly improved.[31]

That is chiefly a challenge to psalm-singing churches.

In their stance on the matter of praise psalm-singing churches are very much in the minority at the beginning of the 21st century. However, there are such Churches in Ireland, Scotland, North America, Australia, Japan and other parts of the world. As for instruments, Orthodox Jews do not use them in their worship to this day. Instrumental accompaniment is still generally excluded from Eastern Orthodox churches. Brethren Assemblies generally do not use instruments at their morning worship service. There is encouragement that other bodies are beginning to look at the biblical requirements for worship. A book published in 2005 entitled *Old Light On New Worship* by John Price, an American Baptist pastor, presents a thorough and convincing case for the exclusion of instruments from Christian worship.

Finally, we note the words of Rev. M. C. Ramsay,

> Many Christian Churches of today should retrace their steps, for they have departed further and further from Apostolic doctrine and worship and consequently from Reformation attainments. Many remedies may be suggested; but surely the remedy is a true revival of the churches - a revival devoid of anything fictitious - a revival which is the result of the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, leading people in deep humility to God, through the mediation of the Lord Jesus. True revival will lead to a return to God, to His Word and to His ways as set forth in the Scriptures. In this way only, will the churches regain their pristine freshness, power and glory; for with teaching and practice - doctrine and worship - brought into conformity with Apostolic Christianity, Christ will be honoured in deed, and not simply in word, as the King as well as the Saviour of the Church. May the Sovereign God outpour the Spirit and arouse the churches from indifference and slumber, and awaken them to a recognition of the loss they incur in not rendering Scriptural worship, and the dishonour they do to God in withholding the glory due to Him.[32]

Notes

M. C. Ramsay, *Psalms Only*, (Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA), 1971), p.25.
Quoted in M. C. Ramsay, *Purity of Worship*, (PCEA, 1968), p.33.
Rowland S. Ward, *The Psalms in Christian Worship*, (PCEA, 1992), p.55.
Quoted in Ward, op. cit., p.65.
Ward, op. cit., pp.27,28.
Quoted in J. W. Keddie, *Why Psalms Only?*, (Scottish Reformed Fellowship, 1978), p.10.
John Ker, *The Psalms in History and Biography*, (Edinburgh, 1886), pp.194,195.
John Ker, op.cit., p.199.
Quoted in Keddie, op. cit., p.11.
Quoted in Ward, op. cit., p.44.
Quoted in article by Edward Donnelly in *The Messenger*, Spring 1967.
Quoted in Ward, op.cit., p.96.
James Kerr, printed in *The Voice of His Praise*, (The James Begg Society, 1999), p.25.
Kerr, op. cit., p.25.
Kerr, op. cit., p.25.
Kerr, op. cit., p.26.
Ward, op. cit., p.58.
Ward, op. cit., p.60.
Kerr, op. cit., p.26.
Kerr, op. cit., p.26.
Ward, op. cit., p.58.
Kerr, op. cit., p.27.
Kerr, op. cit., p.27.
Kerr, op. cit., p.34.
Kerr, op. cit., pp.32,33.
Kerr, op. cit., p.31.
Kerr, op. cit., p.32.
Ramsay, *Purity of Worship*, p.14.
Ward, op. cit., p.84.
Quoted in Ramsay, *Psalms Only*, p.55.
J. Boyd Tweed, *The Communicants Class*, (RPCNA, 1960), p.51.
Ramsay, *Purity of Worship*, pp.40,41.

THE FOUNDATIONS ARE SHAKEN

David Heggarty

David Heggarty is a primary school teacher and is presently completing a doctorate at the School of Education in the Queen's University of Belfast, researching the moral development of children. He is a member of Carrickfergus Reformed Presbyterian Fellowship, Co. Antrim.

An hour before sunrise, 9th February 1971, the San Fernando region was struck by one of the most devastating earthquakes in California history. Although the Richter magnitude of the tremblor was 6.6, ranking it as moderate to large, but not great, it shook a wide, heavily populated area, leaving death and destruction in its wake. Sixty-five lives were lost as a result, and damage was estimated at more than half a billion dollars. It was California's third worst earthquake in terms of lives lost and second in terms of property damage. The greatest damage was in the central San Fernando area, at the feet of the San Gabriel Mountains, where three hospitals were badly damaged (one of them accounting for the greatest loss of lives). Roads collapsed, reservoirs were in danger of imminent failure, forcing people living below them to evacuate, and houses and commercial buildings collapsed or caught fire. Few buildings seemed to have escaped the earthquake's violent rage, but in nearby downtown Pasadena a large white Presbyterian Church, built in 1875, stood intact. Or, so it appeared upon initial inspection.

Having waited patiently for several days for the anticipated dust to settle, the congregation's members organised themselves for a clean-up operation. Most expected a salvage operation. However, as its members began to gather they were delighted to discover their beloved building still intact. Moreover, the pretty whitewashed building, complete with its intricate stained-glass windows, appeared undamaged. Yet, unknown to the congregation as they walked around and casually surveyed their place of worship, underneath their feet a seismic shift had occurred as a result of the earthquake's violent shaking. Later that same week, structural engineers surveying the building consigned the entire edifice to demolition: the entire building had shifted from its very foundations. Here we are reminded of the words of the Psalmist, "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3, NASB). Oftentimes the most profound changes can occur just below the surface; out of eyesight. The consequences however, as with the 1971 earthquake and its indiscernible impact upon Pasadena Presbyterian Church, can be radically destructive.

Foundational changes within the educational domain: setting the scene

The educational domain has likewise experienced its own devastating tectonic shift within its foundations. Traditional theoretical paradigms have given way under pressure from first, progressivist, and then post-modern, conceptualizations of the purposes, methods and values of education. Even a casual reviewing of contemporary philosophy of education literature testifies of this sea-change.[1] In Western liberal-democratic countries, state schools and curricula have fallen victim to the confusing chorus of voices from within Academe, all competing for pre-eminence.

The result has been an uncomfortable synthesis of ideas. Whilst there may be nothing new in the lack of homogeneity among educational theorists and commentators; there appear to be a least two points of convergence emerging from the confusion.

Firstly, schools are no longer understood to be theatres of learning where the pursuit of true knowledge is the chief enterprise. Rather, they are places that promote the *process* of learning as being more important than the acquisition of knowledge.[2] Initially, this may seem fairly innocuous, or even beneficent, but it is here that modern education exposes both the breadth and depth of its fissures. Psychology has replaced philosophy as education's underpinning base. This shift, has had immense ramifications for schools in recent years and continues to do so, resulting in students who are functionally, culturally and morally illiterate.[3]

Secondly, Truth has become a casualty of the new educational order and consequently, there is certainly no room for viewpoints that hold to supernatural explanations or that uphold moral absolutes. God is increasingly excluded from the classroom by those who oversee the secularization of our schools.

This paper intends to act as a primer on the state of contemporary education: examining both its architects' thinking and its ramifications for the Christian community, individual and worldview.

The influence of postmodernism and progressivism

Postmodernism is a term given to a set of related attitudes to contemporary civilization, within the context of the decline of *modernism*. Modernism can be understood as having two distinct principal elements: the functional separation of different spheres of life and the rise of secular universalism, or what is often referred to as "the Enlightenment project".[4] According to some commentators, the postmodern era is characterised by three features that make it markedly different from the modern era: firstly the failure of the Enlightenment project (wherein the philosophers of the Enlightenment

project attempted to ground morality in human nature, using reason alone, without any reference by some to Aristotelian teleology or by others to Christianity[5]); secondly the growth of intracommunal ethical diversity (and its corollary, pluralism); and thirdly the ever-increasing rate of social, economic and technological change.

Whilst the need for brevity precludes a more thorough examination of postmodernism's influence upon education in the West, three common responses to its challenge can be extrapolated from much of the secular literature.

Firstly, there needs to be an increase in personal autonomy to cope with the acute uncertainty of life.[6] Rorty supplies the *second* response by asserting that as a direct consequence of postmodernist trends, a need exists for a continuing faith in universal liberal values not buttressed by absolutely true principles discoverable by reason, but by a pragmatic concern to maintain and develop what has been found to be the most congenial form of polity for humankind.[7] *Lastly*, Gray, addressing pluralist matters, argues that multivalent pluralism is the essence of the postmodern era and that particular forms of liberalism (cut free from any demand for universality) is another possible response.[8]

English and Hill suggest that the general implications of postmodernism within education include an increase in the already influential liberal ideas about pedagogy and learning, particularly those that stem from the American and European progressivist traditions emphasizing non-judgemental multiculturalism and disparate moral values.[9]

Yet such responses will not suffice for thinking Christians, as they merely react to the symptoms of postmodern thought and do not address the fundamental underlying problem itself. Ultimately, postmodernism has downgraded absolute conceptions of truth and promoted strong belief in pragmatism, relativism and maintaining an "open mind." It was in response to this type of thinking that G. K. Chesterton wrote, "The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid."[10]

The postmodern man says, "There is your truth, and there is my truth and whilst they may be contradictory and even incompatible - both positions are equally valid. What is true for you is just that – true, for you!" It was such nonsensical thinking as this that led Francis Schaeffer to distinguish in his vocabulary between what he called "true Truth" and this devalued "truth" term.[11] If no-one's knowledge is necessarily true, everything changes. The question of what counts as "knowledge" to be taught in the schools is no longer a matter of objective evidence or arguments, but rather a matter of power. Those who have the power can make sure their constructs are the ones that dominate the curricula of schools and universities, while other opposing viewpoints are at least partially suppressed, ignored or marginalized.

A key word to learn when trying to understand postmodern education is *constructivism*. Constructivism, whose chief architects include such noteworthies as Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky and Immanuel Kant, is the main underlying learning theory in postmodern education. Constructivism posits the idea that all knowledge is invented or "constructed" in the minds of people. Knowledge is not *discovered* as modernists would claim. In other words, the ideas teachers teach and students learn do not correspond to "reality", they are merely human constructions. Knowledge, ideas and language are created by people, not because they are "true," but rather because they are useful. Reality is a story. All reality exists, not objectively "out there" but in the mind of those who perceive it. Nobody's version of reality can claim to have more objective authority because all versions are merely human creations – *constructs* of their owners. Consequently, the classical philosophical tenets of the thesis-antithesis imperative, together with logic's law of non-contradiction, are slain.

Piaget conceived the notion of constructivism as a way of incorporating the best insights of both empiricist and rationalist accounts of learning. In doing so he further developed the Kantian claim that information from the world is arranged by our psychic constitutions into a form that is intelligible to us. It is in this sense then, that we are understood to "construct what we learn" (Kant, 1963). A synthesis of these views was achieved when Kant's notion on how conceptual schemata are built was alloyed with Piaget's developmental theory about the way in which the mind operates on raw information at different stages in human growth.

Piagetian-constructivism immediately became associated with the *pragmatist* movement within education and wider society. John Dewey (1859-1952), Charles Pierce and William James are the pragmatist thinkers most closely associated with the philosophy of education. Their main innovation within the pragmatist tradition was to complete the alignment of pragmatism and science and, consequently, to elevate science as the primary mode of knowledge within the modern world. Pragmatism is arguably the United States' only indigenous philosophical movement and has had a radical impact upon views of education across the developed world. In Harvey Cox's book *The Secular City*, the Harvard Professor identifies pragmatism as being the defining dynamic within contemporary Western culture. R.C. Sproul provides us with a useful synopsis of this pernicious theoretical movement's affects upon education:

> Pragmatism cut the Gordian knot of metaphysics by arguing that a theory is true only insofar as its actions are "successful". In carrying out pragmatism's program, John Dewey succeeded in revolutionizing our public school system. He disparages epistemology, considering it a pseudo-problem and a waste of time...Dewey's penchant for anti-intellectualism has contributed greatly to the mindlessness of public education ...Gone is the classical method of education

> that produced the intellectual giants of the past – the trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric that provided the foundation for the quadrivium of higher education...No wonder that more than two million families in America are now engaged in the arduous task of homeschooling.[12]

The renaissance of Progressivism

Progressivism may be defined as a cluster of doctrines concerning pedagogy, aims and the curriculum. As such it is particularly germane to gaining an appreciation of the nature of contemporary education. Dewey, Pestalozzi, Froebel and Montessori represent the primary academicians behind the progressivist model. Its legacy of distrusting authority in education and by placing an emphasis on the individual child as the centre of pedagogic concern can be easily identified in today's classrooms.

Currently, Northern Irish schools wait to follow the example of their counterparts in mainland Britain by embracing a *Revised Curriculum*; which many see as a repackaging of progressivist theory, underpinned by psychological and neurological theory that stresses the biological "hardwiring" of humans seeking to develop "Thinking Skills", along with other "Mind Tools". Whilst such terms may sound like mere psycho-babble, they nevertheless testify of the origins of present-day educational trends:

> Today leading educators no longer see their job primarily to be the teaching of [these] *necessary* skills. The philosophy of education has undergone a fundamental change. Educators now perceive their jobs to be the complete "remobilization" of the child – the complete reshaping of his values, beliefs and morals.[13]

The progressivist movement looks back to the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) for its rationale, especially his treatise on the purpose and nature of education, *Emile*. In this work, Rousseau contends that any kind of social relationship (and therefore encompassing the teacher-student relationship) that involves asymmetrical power relations, which are not consciously entered into by free and equal rational beings, even when it expresses legitimate authority, is detrimental. Here, the reader may discern some echoes of what is often euphemistically referred to as "contemporary parenting" advice. As is so often the case in our age, what passes for *new* thinking is in fact, *old* thinking.

In summary, progressivism calls for pupils to be empowered to learn what they wish to learn when they are ready to do so, and the preferred pedagogical method should be play-enriched with the covert guidance of the teacher, who then becomes a *facilitator*. "Child-centred learning", "learner-centred learning", "discovery learning", "experiential learning", "flexible learning" and "self-directed learning" are all garden varieties of progressivist education.

The central tenets of progressivism entered mainstream education courtesy of the psychology of Piaget, and again more recently through the work of Noam Chomsky, both men viewing the enterprise of education through the monochromatic lens of psychology. In doing so, a skewed image of learning emerges: one in which, unsurprisingly, human beings are elevated to a position of autonomy, free to create their own understanding of the world around them, unconstrained by any sense of purpose or morality. Education becomes more akin to a psychological process wherein man not only decides *what* ought to be learned and *how*, but also reserves the right to reject anything that smacks of objective truth.

Perhaps it was due to his acute awareness of these facts that led Charles Francis Potter, an original signatory of the first Humanist Manifesto and Honorary President of the National Education Association (USA), to say of state-funded education, "Education is thus a most powerful ally of Humanism, and every American public school is a school of Humanism."[14] As we have earlier noted, the cross-fertilization of ideas between the United States and the United Kingdom has been such that what is true of one nation's public education system is generally true of the other.

The consequences of ideas: moral relativism and illiteracy with our classrooms

As noted earlier, *relativism* is the view that truth and absolute values (other than "tolerance" and "openness") do not exist. It is the *modus operandi* of modern schools and universities. It is a philosophy which frustrates the true educational enterprise. Such an erroneous conviction - that true knowledge is unobtainable, as it does not even exist - leaves students with no appetite to seek after knowledge. Indeed, to do so would be a fool's errand. According to Allan Bloom, the search for truth has been replaced by an unsubstantial awareness that there are many cultures and since cultures have different values, truth must not exist.[15] As a result, the school pupil and university student conclude that no values are superior to others or worth defending. Without the aid of substantial books, without heroes, without knowledge and the ability to think logically the student lacks the resources to fight conformity in a world that denies any firm foundation for virtue and truth.

There is, however, a great irony resulting from the state of contemporary education: *illiteracy*. The revolution that has purposed to undermine and replace traditional values and modes of teaching and learning, has actually led to high levels of illiteracy. In the United Kingdom one in five adults is thought to be *functionally illiterate* (the ability to understand the written word well enough to function within our society). In the United States around thirteen percent of all seventeen-year-olds are functionally illiterate, as are twenty-four

million of the general population. The late Professor Karl Shapiro at the University of California highlighted this outcome of progressive education within a supposedly sophisticated postmodern society:

> What is really distressing is that this generation cannot and does not read. I am speaking of university students in what are supposed to be our best universities. Their illiteracy is staggering...We are experiencing a literacy breakdown which is unlike anything I know of in the history of letters.[16]

Ronald Nash identifies two further aspects of illiteracy born out of contemporary educational methods.[17] Firstly, there is the additional problem of *cultural illiteracy*. This term describes students who are functionally literate, but lack the necessary educational tools to engage critically with the modern world. Professor Eric Donald Hirsch Jr. is the most prominent scholar associated with this concept of cultural illiteracy. Hirsch argues that educators often believe that a child's intellectual and social skills will develop naturally without regard to the specific content of their education.[18] Therefore, educators working at all levels of education – from the nursery school to the Academy – are more interested in *how* students learn rather than *what* they learn. Because of this belief, children and young adults will fail to store away enough information to become culturally literate.

Some educators will reluctantly admit to the problems of functional and cultural illiteracy, and even shoulder some of the blame. However, far from being embarrassed by the third form of illiteracy – *moral illiteracy* – they are manifestly proud of the part they have played in dismantling the old structure in which there were commonly agreed ethics, morals and virtues. Nash sees moral illiteracy as a cultural battle between those who are religious and support traditional values and those who are secular and promote anti-traditional or modernist values.

Concern regarding the problem of moral illiteracy is not restricted to evangelical Christians. Jewish scholar Will Herberg is credited with coining the phrase "cut flower culture" to describe the spiritual rootlessness of modern European and American societies. This epithet is typically taken to imply that these societies cannot long survive without being regrafted onto their Judeo-Christian roots. In *Judaism and Modern Man*, Herberg writes:

> The attempt made in recent decades by secularist thinkers to disengage the moral principles of western civilization from their scripturally based religious context, in the assurance that they could live a life of their own as "humanistic" ethics, has resulted in our "cut flower culture." Cut flowers retain their original beauty and fragrance, but only so long as they retain the vitality that they have drawn from their now-severed roots; after that is exhausted, they wither and die. So with freedom, brotherhood, justice, and personal dignity —

the values that form the moral foundation of our civilization. Without the life-giving power of the faith out of which they have sprung, they possess neither meaning nor vitality.[19]

Elsewhere, Herberg comments:

> We are surrounded on all sides by the wreckage of our great intellectual tradition. In this kind of spiritual chaos, neither freedom nor order is possible. Instead of freedom, we have the all-engulfing whirl of pleasure and power; instead of order, we have the jungle wilderness of normlessness and self-indulgence.[20]

The attending bias against religious and moral values has left society with a generation of moral illiterates. John Silber, much-published educationalist, laments this fact in his powerful book *Straight Shooting*:

> In generations past, parents were more diligent in passing on their principles and values to their children and were assisted by churches and schools which emphasized religious and moral education. In recent years, in contrast, our society has become increasingly secular and the curriculum of public schools has been denuded of almost all ethical content. As a result universities must confront a student body ignorant of the evidence and arguments that underlie and support many of our traditional moral principles and practices.[21]

The recovery of belief from the wreckage

The loss of moral order within education and broader society stems from the systematic dismantling of our intellectual tradition, which traditionally affirmed belief in the existence of a transcendent, universal moral Being and order. Important thinkers throughout history (though not exclusively Christian ones) have contended that there is a higher order of permanent things, that human happiness is dependent on living our lives in harmony with this transcendent order and that society must, likewise, act in accordance with this order. Plato, for example, understood that there must be some universal or absolute under which the individual things (the particulars and the details) must fit. Something beyond the everyday must be there to give it all unity and meaning. Even the atheist and existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre realized that a finite point is absurd if it has no infinite reference point. Sartre chose to believe that this infinite reference point did not exist, therefore, the only thing worth doing is existing and making choices, regardless of what those choices may be. But how can we tell students, or our children, that anything is right or wrong if there is no absolute reference point such as the Bible, to base this on? Patently, the primary aim of education must be to highlight the reality of this transcendent order; to underscore the importance of its content; and to acknowledge its Divine Author.

The forces of relativism that undermine our educational systems, together with the minds of students, are a powerful enemy to confront. To defeat this foe, a single, unified world- and life-view must be embraced. As Christian philosopher Gordon Clark once observed, if someone wishes to unify education, it is not enough to say that a philosophical base is necessary. To accomplish such a result, it is essential to provide *the* philosophy. Only Christian theism can accomplish this task adequately, providing those who by grace hold its tenets as true, with both a coherent *Weltanschauung*, and most importantly, a relationship with the one true living God.

Learning *for* God: a challenge to educators, parents and students

Modern education has impoverished the hearts and minds of today's students. The assumed absence of a transcendent God, the non-existence of anything beyond the physical world, and the complete autonomy of each individual has perpetrated radical violence on the true enterprise of education: the pursuit of truth and of God himself (Matthew 22:37). As believers, we must also avoid the habit of compartmentalizing knowledge into sacred and secular components, as such a division is not warranted by Scripture. All truth, goodness and beauty belong ultimately to God; there exists no other source. Whilst these characteristics may not be ultimate realities in and of themselves, they each point beyond themselves to Almighty God himself.

Therefore, for Christians truly to engage in the educational enterprise, they need to develop a worldview consistent with ultimate reality and truth as revealed in Holy Scripture. With such an epistemology in place, students both young and old will be able to engage meaningfully and effectively with the ideas expounded by contemporary education. For as we have seen, ideas have consequences.

But *how* should Christians respond to the decadence of contemporary education? For whether teacher or student, parent or child: a response *is* required. J. Gresham Machen, commenting on education and the Christian, had this to say:

> The most important Christian education institution is not the pulpit or the school...it is the Christian family. And that institution has to a very large extent ceased to do its work. [12]

Stinging criticism, no? Thus, the educational role of the family needs to be re-emphasized by the Church and subsequently, revitalized. The biblical injunction to train and educate children is given to parents (Proverbs 22:6; ~~Ephesians 6:4~~). The responsibility rests with them. Parents need to be actively involved in seeing that their offspring mature both theologically and

intellectually.

Arguably, this duty has been too readily abdicated to the state (replete with all its inherent prejudices against Christ and his Church) and at the worst possible juncture. With the nineteenth century ending with Fredrich Nietzsche's philosophic declaration that "God is dead", the following decades fell into line and Christiantity's fragrance was systematically extracted from state education over the succeeding decades of the 1900s.

It is a sad irony that it was during these tumultuous times within the history of ideas that many Churches handed responsibility for educating society's young over to government. Any assurances that the Church would retain significant influence over education have not proven enduring. The Church therefore, together with the wider Christian community, needs to accept greater responsibility for the educational welfare of its members - particularly the young – and proactively seek to influence education for the good of all.

Individuals can bring their influence to bear upon their local education authorities and schools by getting involved in Parent-Teacher Associations, Boards of Governors, and many other key aspects of schools and colleges. By getting involved, Christians can help combat the hostile attitudes against biblical thought that dominate the educational domain. In days when "parental choice" and "parent power" are buzz-words, believing parents need to play their part in forming the educational experiences of their children's generation. Families need to work together to develop Christian thinking in the minds of their young, thinking that can in turn apply Christian truth to all areas of life, bringing glory and honour to him who has authority, power and dominion over all things past and present (Ephesians 1:21).

Notes

Christopher Winch and John Gingell, *Key Concepts in The Philosophy of Education* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp.175-178.

Winch and Gingell, op. cit., pp.183-184.

Ronald Nash, *The Closing of the American Heart* (Richardson, Texas: Probe, 1991), pp.45-60.

R.C. Sproul, *The Consequences of Ideas* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2000), pp.117-131.

Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981).

Zygmunt Bauman, *Education: For, Under and in Spite of Modernity*. Annual Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain,1997.

Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth, Philosophical Papers*, vol.1 (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1991).

John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake* (London: Routledge, 1995).

F.W English and J.C. Hill, *Total Quality Education: Transforming Schools into Learning Places* (Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin, 1994).

G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography, Collected Works*, Vol. 16 (London: Ignatius Press, 1988), p. 212.

Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1968).

Sproul, op.cit., p.200.
Russ Wise, *Education and New Age Humanism* (Richardson, Tx: Probe Ministries, 2002), p.3.
Charles Krauthammer, "Education: Doing Bad and Feeling Good" (*Time Magazine*, 5 February 1990), p.78.
Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).
Karl Shapiro, *Presentation to the California Library Association;* quoted in S.L. Blumenfeld, *NEA: Trojan Horse in American Education* (Boise, Idaho: The Paradigm Co., 1984), p.xii.
Ronald Nash, "The Three Kinds of Illiteracy", *Antithesis Journal*, Vol.1, No.5 (September/October 1990), pp.6-8.
E.D. Hirsh, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p.xiii.
Will Herberg, "Modern Man in a Metaphysical Wasteland", *The Intercollegiate Review*, 5 (Winter 1968-69), p.79.
Herberg, op. cit., pp.79-80.
John Silber, *Straight Shooting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), p.xiv.
J. Gresham Machen, *Education, Christianity, and the State*, ed. John W. Robbins (Jefferson, Md., The Trinity Foundation, 1987), p.8.

LISTENING TO THE SONG OF SONGS

A Survey of the Major Interpretative Issues

Anthony T. Selvaggio

Anthony T. Selvaggio is Minister of College Hill Reformed Presbyterian Church (RPCNA) in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. He is also an Adjunct Professor of Biblical Studies at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and has authored a book based on the Song of Songs entitled "What the Bible Teaches About Marriage" (Evangelical Press, 2007).

It has long been my observation that preachers have neglected the Old Testament. Therefore, when I entered the ministry I made a commitment to preach from the Old Testament on a regular basis. I decided to begin my preaching with what I considered to be the most neglected areas of the Old Testament. In my mind, this included areas such as the Minor Prophets and, most of all, the Song of Songs. Preaching through the Minor Prophets proved relatively easy. The interpretative issues are not overwhelming, there is an evangelical scholarly consensus regarding the central message of these books and the people in the pew were generally well equipped to assimilate the material. However, my endeavor to preach through the Song of Songs was an entirely different experience.

I soon found myself in the midst of a dense jungle of interpretative challenges and probing questions regarding this much-neglected portion of God's Word. The purpose of this article is to provide other preachers with some guidance in meeting these interpretative challenges and answering these probing questions. It is my hope that this article will not only prove helpful as a navigational tool for pastors, but also serve as an encouragement to them to embark on their own journey through this rich portion of the Holy Scripture. For, like the rest of Scripture, the Song of Songs is also "God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Title and the Author

Let's begin our inquiry at the beginning of the book. The first question which arises when attempting to interpret the Song of Songs is the question of

its title and authorship. As these questions are interrelated they will be answered together.

Historically, this book was known as the "Song of Solomon" because it was assumed that Solomon was its author.[1] At first glance, it would seem that the book itself declares that Solomon is its author. After all, the first verse (or "superscription") reads, "Solomon's Song of Songs." Seems like an open and shut case. However, while on its face this verse may seem to have only one possible meaning, there are actually four ways this phrase could be understood in the original Hebrew:

1) The verse could mean that Solomon authored this book;

2) It could mean that the Song was dedicated to Solomon;

3) It could mean that it is a Song about Solomon;

4) Finally, it could mean that the Song is "Solomonic" in nature, that it is was authored by someone else who had the intent to write a song which was representative of the wisdom tradition established by Solomon.[2]

Furthermore, even if we grant that the first of these options is correct, that Solomon is being referred to as the author, the superscription found in the first verse may only apply to a portion of this book. Just because Solomon may be the author of one part of the Song, does not mean he authored the entire book. For example, consider the Book of Proverbs. In that book the superscription reads, "The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel," (Proverbs 1:1), but later on we encounter other Proverbs attributed to Agur (30:1) and Lemuel (31:1). Further evidence against Solomonic authorship is the fact that when Solomon appears in the Song it is only via third person reference; he does not give any of the first-person speeches in the Song.[3]

In conclusion, while there is some evidence that Solomon was the author of this book, we simply cannot be sure. Therefore, many contemporary evangelical scholars refer to this book as the "Song of Songs." This title is an appropriate biblical title because it comes from the first two Hebrew words which appear in the text. The phrase "song of songs" is simply a way of expressing the superlative nature of the song. In other words, this book is not just any average song, but rather it is the greatest of all songs.[4] It is important to note that adopting the title "Song of Songs" does not in any way rule out the possibility that Solomon was the author, but it does not demand it either.

Methods of Interpretation

As you might imagine, given its explicit sexual and romantic content, the Song of Songs has been very controversial throughout church history. The controversy has primarily centered around how to interpret the Song of Songs properly. Historically, there have been three main ways in which the Song of Songs has been interpreted: as an allegory, as a drama and as love poetry. Let's

briefly assess each of these methods of interpretation.

The Allegorical Interpretation

The allegorical method of interpretation maintains that the Song should be understood primarily, if not exclusively, as an allegory of Christ's loving relationship with his bride, the church. Advocates of this view often suggest that the Song says nothing about human love or sexuality, but is rather entirely about divine love. It is important to point out that the allegorical method of interpretation has been the predominate method of interpreting the Song in church history.[5] This was true both before and after the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. This is noteworthy because one of the hallmarks of the Protestant Reformation was liberating the Scripture from the fanciful allegorical interpretations of medieval theologians. However, when it came to the Song of Songs most Protestant exegetes interpreted the book in a way similar to their medieval predecessors: they allegorized and spiritualized it.

There is much to commend this approach to the Song. First, there is a strong biblical basis for suggesting that this book is speaking about God's loving relationship for his people. After all, we know from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians (5:22-33) that God employs the marriage relationship as an analogy for Christ's relationship with the church. Similarly, in the Old Testament, God uses the marriage metaphor to express his relationship to Israel. Consider for example the book of Hosea, or the following Old Testament texts:

> Isaiah 54:5 "For your Maker is your husband -
> the LORD Almighty is his name –
> the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer;
> he is called the God of all the earth."

> Jeremiah 3:20 "'But like a woman unfaithful to her husband,
> so you have been unfaithful to me, O house of Israel,' declares the LORD."

Second, the entire Bible ultimately points us to divine love and the nature, glory and attributes of God. Approaching the Song allegorically certainly highlights these truths. Finally, the mere fact of the overwhelming acceptance of this method throughout church history suggests that one should not dismiss it casually.

Although the allegorical method has much to commend it, I cannot accept it as the sole, or primary, method of interpreting the Song. I reject this method of interpretation for the following reasons.

First, it is difficult to make the allegorical interpretation fit the substance of the text of the Song. The subject matter of the Song, on its face, seems to be

speaking first and foremost about human love and sexuality. This reality has forced many advocates of the allegorical method to stretch the Song to fit their hermeneutic. Sometimes these efforts to "spiritualize" the content of the Song of Songs have resulted in outlandish interpretations. For example, one church father, Cyril of Alexandria, interpreted the woman's breasts mentioned in 1:13 as symbolic of the Old and New Testaments.[6]

Second, the allegorical approach to the Song originated from an unbiblical presupposition regarding human sexuality and romantic love. Unfortunately, many theologians in the early and medieval church adopted a form of Platonic dualism which understood the flesh as being inferior to the spirit. This led many theologians to consider human sexuality as a necessary evil at best. Of course, a theologian maintaining such a presupposition would not be inclined to see a celebration of human sexuality in the Song of Songs. For example, Tremper Longman describes how this presupposition influenced Origen's interpretation of the Song:

> On a practical level, he felt that Christian spirituality entailed a denigration of fleshly concerns, most notably sexuality, a viewpoint that obviously would impact his understanding of the Song of Songs. Indeed, his views on sexuality were so strong that it appears that they moved Origen to undergo castration, and what Origen did to his own body, he did, via allegorical interpretation, to the Song of Songs—he 'desexed' it.[7]

This predilection to "desex" the Song on the part of those who contend for the allegorical interpretation has led to damaging consequences, chief of which is that the book ceases to have any application to an important aspect of human existence: romance, love and sexuality. Those who advocate for the allegorical interpretation of the Song are right to point us ultimately to divine-human love, but they err in denying the significant application of this book to the realm of human sexuality.

Third, while the Bible uses the marriage relationship as an analogy of God's loving relationship with his people there is nothing within the text of the Song which suggests that this was the author's intent. In addition, the Song is never quoted elsewhere in the Bible in a way which would suggest such a connection. The word "God" does not even appear in the Song, suggesting that its primary focus is on human love rather than divine love. As Tremper Longman has noted, "...there is absolutely nothing in the Song of Songs itself that hints of a meaning different from the sexual meaning."[8]

Finally, the strongest argument is that when one takes this book at face value it seems to be primarily about human love rather than divine love. Its characters, content, and metaphors suggest that we are dealing first and foremost with the intricacies of human romantic love.

Although I reject the allegorical method of interpretation as the primary

or exclusive method of interpretation, I do think the Song ultimately points us to divine-human love. We will look at that issue in just a few moments, but first let's examine another method of interpreting the Song.

Dramatic Interpretation

The dramatic method of interpretation is a much more recent attempt to explain the Song. This approach maintains that the Song of Songs involves a coherent unified plot structure which begins with an introduction, includes dialogue between characters and progresses to a concluding climax.[9]

Advocates of the dramatic method differ regarding the number of characters involved in this supposed drama and the plot tension of the drama. Some maintain that the drama involves two characters, Solomon (the "lover") and the Shulammite woman (the "beloved"). According to this view, the story is essentially about a sophisticated king (Solomon) pursuing a simple country girl.[10] Those who advocate this approach contend that the drama is meant to extol the virtues of the Shulammite woman because she teaches Solomon, who shamed himself by marrying many wives, the meaning of true monogamous love. One advocate of this approach, Franz Delitszch, describes the plot of the drama as follows:

> Solomon appears here in loving fellowship with a woman such as he had not found among a thousand (Eccles. 7:28); and although in social rank far beneath him, he raises her to equality with himself. That which attached her to him is not her personal beauty alone, but her beauty animated and heightened by nobility of soul. She is a pattern of simple devotedness, naïve simplicity, unaffected modesty, moral purity, and frank prudence, a lily of the field, more beautifully adorned than he could claim to be in all his glory.[11]

According to this theory of interpretation, the Song of Songs is a unified drama about a common girl who changes the heart of the king by teaching him about true love.

However, other advocates of the dramatic interpretation suggest that the drama involves three characters: King Solomon, the Shulammite woman ("the beloved") and a third man (the "lover"), who is usually identified as a country shepherd. According to this view, what drives the plot of the Song is the tension of a love-triangle as Solomon the powerful king competes with the simple country shepherd boy for the love of the Shulammite woman. In this version, Solomon's involvement is viewed in negative terms. He is portrayed as the powerful and possessive king who is attempting to use his power to destroy the true love shared by the Shulammite and her country shepherd. Tremper Longman summarizes the plot of the three-character view as follows:

> The plot surrounds a country girl who has, unfortunately for her, caught the eye of the lustful king Solomon, who wants to carry her away to his harem. She, however, is deeply in love with a shepherd, a country lad, and she does everything she can to resist the advances of the lascivious king.[12]

Furthermore, one modern commentary suggests an additional twist on this three-character drama. Ian Provan maintains that the Shulammite woman in the drama is already a member of Solomon's harem and the point of the Song is to contrast the controlling and manipulative love of Solomon to the true and pure love found between the Shulammite woman and her simple country shepherd boy. Provan describes how Solomon is used as a foil to advance the author's goal of revealing the glory of true love:

> Solomon is the foil for this author's broader purposes, for Solomon's relationships with women represent the antithesis of the relationship between a man and a woman that the author wishes us to admire and (implicitly) to imitate.[13]

While the dramatic view has some arguments in its favor, including the fact that there are dramatic elements in the Song, I am not fully persuaded that it is the best way to interpret the Song of Songs. I come to this conclusion for the same reasons suggested by Old Testament scholars Raymond Dillard and Tremper Longman.

First, Dillard and Longman note that it is "impossible to definitively assign passages to specific characters."[14] Their point is that the book does not break down neatly into separate parts like we would expect from a modern play. Second, they point out that drama, as a genre of literature, is "unattested in the Bible and in the literature of the ancient Near East."[15] Finally, Dillard and Longman conclude that the dramatic approach fails to pass muster because its proponents cannot clearly demonstrate the plot structure they suggest.[16] In other words, the Song, by a plain reading of the text, does not read as a progressive narrative with a unified plot which concludes with a climax. Like the allegorical method, the dramatic method often forces the interpreter to conform the text to fit their dramatic interpretation rather than allowing it to speak unencumbered. While the Song certainly includes dramatic content, it is not at a drama *per se*.

Love Poetry

The final method of interpreting the Song is to interpret it as a collection of human love poetry. This view, with which I am in general agreement, interprets the Song as primarily revealing the beauty of redeemed human romantic love and sexuality expressed within the context of marriage. The

unifying factor present in this collection of poetry is that the poems all relate to the love shared between the two primary characters: the "lover" and the "beloved." Frankly, the strongest argument for this view is one which should appeal to anyone who has respect for the Bible and who desires to read the Bible plainly.[17] Just open the Song and begin reading. When one does this it becomes immediately and abundantly clear that it is primarily about romantic love between a man and a woman. Such a plain reading not only avoids reading into the text things which are not there, it also allows us to contemplate what is there, a redeemed view of an important aspect of human life.

So, how does identifying the Song of Songs as love poetry help us to listen better to the song? It cues us into what to expect from it. We should not expect a unified drama or an allegory, rather we should expect poetry. Tremper Longman notes how treating the Song as love poetry impacts its interpretation:

> The conclusion that the Song is an anthology of love poetry as opposed to a drama significantly affects the task of the commentator. It turns attention away from the explanation of a story, or, more pointedly, the construction of a story, to the explication of the meaning of words and metaphors and an attempt to bring out the emotional texture of the poems.[18]

Understanding the Song as love poetry helps us to better discern its meaning. It assists us in seeing that the Song is meant to show us, through the vehicle of poetry, God's will for human love. Its purpose is to provide us with poetic wisdom to guide us as we attempt to glorify God in the realm of the marriage relationship.

A Balanced Approach

Although I believe that the Song should be interpreted primarily as love poetry, this does not mean that the Song does not speak of Jesus, nor does it mean that the Song says nothing about divine-human love. One of the great errors of modern biblical scholarship regarding the Song is to argue that just because the Song is not *primarily* an allegory it has no allegorical meaning at all. In other words, modern scholars have been too quick to throw out the baby with the bathwater when it comes to allegory in the Song. Ian Provan notes of such scholars:

> They have assumed that if we once demonstrate the unlikelihood that the text was originally meant primarily as allegory, and if we have demonstrated the absurdity of many of the detailed allegorizations that have been offered historically, we have also thereby dismissed allegorization completely as an aspect of the author's likely intentions. Authors need not have only one aim in writing or one intention in the words they use.[19]

Therefore, while I believe the Song should be understood primarily as poetry about human romance and sexuality, I also believe that there are allegorical, or perhaps better stated "typological" or "messianic," connections to Christ's relationship to the church which can appropriately be made from the Song.[20] After all, our redemptive relationship with Jesus Christ is central to every realm of human existence, including human sexuality and romance. We only know how to love redemptively because he first loved us.

In conclusion, while I advocate the poetic approach to the Song, I do so humbly. I do not relish going against the grain of nearly two thousand years of biblical interpretation. I recall the words of warning from the famed Old Testament scholar Franz Delitszch who wrote,

> The Song is the most obscure book of the Old Testament. Whatever principle of interpretation one may adopt, there always remain a number of inexplicable passages....."[21].

This is a challenging book, unique in the Bible, but like all of God's revelation it reveals his glory and teaches us how to glorify him by living our lives according to his standard.

The Identity of the Characters

A second challenge which arises when one endeavors to exegete the Song is identifying the various characters which appear in the book. There is a total of six characters in the Song. The main characters are, of course, the two lovers - the Shulammite woman and the man. We will examine these two main characters before we move on to the four secondary characters.

There is not much controversy about the woman's identity. She bears the title "Shulammite" (Song 6:13) which is most likely a geographical reference to her home town[22]. She is also a common country girl with no regal heritage. Interestingly, the woman is the predominant character in the Song in the sense that she speaks more often than the man.

On the other hand, there is much controversy regarding the identity of the man. Some scholars suggest that the man is Solomon, while others suggest he is a common country shepherd. This debate arises because of the different titles attributed to this man in the Song. For example, the man is described in the Song as a "king" (1:4), which has led many Biblical scholars to identify him as Solomon, but he is also described as a "shepherd" (1:7), which has led other scholars to conclude that he cannot be Solomon. The debate is further complicated by the fact that it is quite possible that neither of these titles should be taken literally; they may simply be metaphors for the man's role in relation to his beloved.[23] Again we simply cannot be definitively sure of the identity of

the man, but I lean toward the determination that the man is not Solomon, but rather a country shepherd.

There is one additional theory about the identity of the two main characters that is worth mentioning. This theory contends that the man and woman depicted in these poems may not be actual historical persons, but rather representative figures who are employed by the poet to demonstrate to the reader the ideal of true love. For example, one commentator refers to the man and woman as "representatives of Everyman and Everywoman."[24] While we can't be conclusive about the exact identity of the man and the woman, what is clear is that their romance serves as the centre of these poems and a record of it was preserved for us to show us how to love according to God's standards.[25]

In addition to the two main characters, there are also four secondary characters in the Song. First, there is a group of women who are referred to by various titles including, "young women," "daughters of Jerusalem," or "daughters of Zion" (see Song 1:5, 2:7; 3:5; 3:10; 5:8; 5:16; and 8:4). These women engage in conversations with the Shulammite woman about the nature of love and her lover in particular. At times they are also instructed by the Shulammite woman about matters of the heart, which suggests they are a group of younger unmarried women who are being instructed by the wiser and more experienced Shulammite woman. Second, we also encounter the woman's brothers. They only appear in two places in the Song. The woman speaks of them once (1:5-6) and they speak once (8:8-9). Although we know very little about the brothers from the Song, they appear to play primarily a protective role. Given that the Shulammite woman's father is not mentioned at all in the Song, we can assume that he is deceased and, therefore, her brothers have taken up the role of the father. They protect their sister's chastity and assist her as she pursues marriage. Third, the Shulammite's mother is referenced in the Song four times (3:4,11; 6:9; 8:1), but never speaks. Finally, we have King Solomon. He also never speaks in the Song and is referred to just five times (1:5, 3:9, 3:11, 8:11, 8:12).

The Marital Status of the Couple

One of the probing questions which emerge when one begins to interpret the Song is the question of the marital status of the couple. As you begin reading the Song you may wonder whether it depicts the expression of sexuality outside the bounds of marriage. Some have suggested that the couple is not married because there is no overt statement in the book which reveals that they are a married couple, nor is there a wedding ceremony involving the couple.[26] In addition, as you read through the Song it seems like the couple experiences a sexual encounter near the middle of the book (Song 3:6-5:1), but when you arrive at the final chapter of the book the couple seems to be in an

unmarried state. Given these factors, some liberal and critical scholars have concluded that the Song celebrates sexuality outside the bounds of marriage. However, this understanding of the Song is incredible and should be rejected for the following reasons.

First, while it is true that there is no overt statement of the couple's marriage in the book, the women is frequently referred to by the term "bride" (4:8-12; 5:1). Second, and more importantly, to read the Song as celebrating pre-marital or extra-marital sex is to make the error of reading our modern context back into an ancient document. Unfortunately, in our day both pre-marital sex and living together prior to marriage are all too common. However, this was not the case in the culture out of which the Song arose. While in our day we cannot assume that a couple having sexual relations is married, in the day in which the Song was written this assumption was clearly appropriate! In other words, the Song does not contain an overt statement of marriage between the man and woman because the original readers would have considered this as a given fact and, therefore, there was no need to make it overt. Frankly, it would be inconceivable that sexuality would be celebrated in any other context except within marriage in the ancient Near East. Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman rightly reminds us that we must read the Song within the broader context of the entire Bible which clearly restricts sexual expression to the marriage relationship.[27]

Clearly, given the aforementioned reasons, it is proper to consider the Song as depicting the joy of sexuality and romantic love within the context of marriage. However, what about the argument that points out that the consummation of the physical relationship occurs in the middle of the book (Song 3:6-5:1) and the couple appears to be unmarried at the end of book? For example, in 4:10 the man speaks of the joy of physical love declaring, "How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice!" However, near the end of the Song we find the brothers exercising their protective care over their sister's chastity: "We have a young sister, and her breasts are not yet grown. What shall we do for our sister for the day she is spoken for? If she is a wall, we will build towers of silver on her. If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar," (Song 8:8-10). These verses clearly speak of the pre-marital courtship phase in which her brothers are depicted as protecting their sister for her prospective wedding day ("the day she is spoken for"). Some liberal commentators have suggested that this proves that the couple engaged in pre-marital sexual relations in the middle of the book (Song 3:6-5:1).

While this argument may at first seem plausible, it ultimately does not hold water. The problem with this interpretation is that it reads the Song as if it were a unified drama written in a linear and chronological fashion. In other words, it expects the Song to be organized like a modern story in which the plot

builds and reaches its climax at the end. As we have already noted, the Song is not a unified drama, but rather a collection of love poems. Therefore, we should not expect a unified chronological story. Furthermore, ancient Hebrew poetry often does not reflect the same linear and chronological pattern which we expect in modern literature.

Some commentators have suggested that the poems of the Song are organized according to a common Hebrew poetic pattern known as a "chiasm." In many chiastic patterns the most important event, the climax, is placed in the center of the text, rather than at the end. Another feature of a chiastic pattern is that the beginning and the end of the text repeat the same theme; they correspond to one another. What does this pattern suggest about the Song? It suggests that if the Song of Songs is indeed structured in a chiastic manner, which I believe it is, then one would fully expect the consummation of the marriage to be in the center of the text and the courtship experiences of the couple to appear both in the beginning *and* the end of the book. Let me demonstrate this by giving you an example of the chiastic pattern of the Song of Songs suggested by biblical scholar, Andrew Hwang[28]:

A Song 1:2-8
B Song 1:9-2:7
C Song 2:8-17
D Song 3:1-5
X Song 3:6-5:1
(the consummation of marriage)
D' Song 5:2-6:3
C' Song 6:4-13
B' Song 7:1-13
A' Song 8:1-14

According to Hwang's suggested structure, letters A to D and, their corresponding counterparts, letters A to D all reflect the couple in a courtship, pre-marital phase.[29] The letter X serves as the climatic center of the Song wherein the couple experiences the physical consummation of their relationship in the marriage context. Adding support to this theory is the fact that the first verse of chapter five, the verse which most vividly speaks of the consummation of the couple's physical relationship, represents the exact middle of the book in the original Hebrew. There are 111 lines of text between Song 1:2 and 4:15 and 111 lines of text between Song 5:2 and 8:14.[30] One commentator describes Song 5:1 as the "fulcrum or center of gravity" of the book.[31] In summary, the presence of this chiastic structure in the Song not only refutes the view that the couple engaged in pre-marital sex, but it also serves as a reminder to the reader that one can't expect the Song to conform to the

patterns one would expect from modern literature.

Based on these arguments, it is irrefutable that the Song depicts human sexuality as occurring in the context of marriage. The lovers are indeed husband and wife.

The Song and the Single

Another question which crops up regarding the Song, particularly in the congregational setting, is whether this book has any relevance to single people. One of the dangers that all pastors face is the temptation to focus their ministry solely on married couples with children and while neglecting people who are unmarried. It is important for the church to try to avoid this error. However, one wonders how this can be avoided when preaching from a book like the Song of Songs. After all, this entire book is about human sexuality experienced in the context of marriage. So does this book have anything to say to people who are single? My answer is an emphatic "Yes!"

First, those who are presently single in our congregations will likely one day be married. Studying the Song will help prepare them for marriage. In fact, there is an episode in the Song which seems to suggest that is part of the purpose of the Song. As we have already discussed, the woman is frequently depicted as speaking to a group of young unmarried women who are most frequently referred to as the "daughters of Jerusalem." It seems that part of the woman's role is to instruct these younger prospective wives about the nature of love. For example, in 8:4 the woman explicitly teaches these young women about the dangerous nature of love: "Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires." The Song itself reveals that part of its purpose is to instruct those who are presently single, but expect to be married in the future.

However, I realize that some in our congregations will be called by God to remain single throughout their lives or have become single through various circumstances which make remarriage unlikely. The Song has relevance for these individuals as well. Those called to singleness will continue to have a role in nurturing and discipling others who will enter into marriage and the Song will help them to give good counsel. Also, and more importantly, the Song ultimately points us to the nature of divine love and redemption in Christ. That message knows no boundaries or limitations.

Conclusion

As you can see, preaching through the Song of Songs is not for the faint of heart. Because of the nature of its content and the interpretative challenges which it presents, many wise Christian leaders have cautioned about engaging this material without the requisite spiritual preparation and maturity necessary

to handle it. For example, the great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon declared that the Song was not for the spiritually immature, noting that "its music belongs to the higher spiritual life, and has no charm in it for unspiritual ears. The Song occupies a sacred enclosure into which none may enter unprepared."[32] Spurgeon's sage words are true both for the lay reader in the pew and the pastor behind the pulpit. My hope is that this article will encourage you to engage in the cognitive and spiritual exertion necessary faithfully to share the beautiful music of the Song of Songs with your congregation. My hope is that you will enable others to listen to the Song.

Notes

1. You may also be familiar with another name given to this book "Canticles." This name comes from the title given to this book in the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible.
2. Tremper Longman, *Song of Songs: NICOT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), p.3.
3. Ian Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), p.235.
4. The phrase "Song of Songs" has a similar emphatic quality as the phrase "King of Kings" or "Lord of Lords."
5. The allegorical method was also the historically predominant method of interpretation among Jewish scholars. See Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), p.260.
6. Op.cit., p.260. John Gill, the great 18th Century Baptist theologian, interpreted the woman's breasts in Song 1:13 as referring to the two ordinances of the Gospel - baptism and the Lord's Supper.
7. Longman, *Song of Songs*, p.29.
8. Op.cit., p.36.
9. This view is evident in how some Bible translations arrange the Song. For example, the NIV attempts to divide the Song into sections with titles such as "Beloved," "Lover" and "Friends." These titles, which are not part of the original text, suggest an attempt at rendering the Song as a drama. See Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction*, p.258.
10. This view was advocated by Franz Delitzsch. See C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon: Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol.6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1966).
11. Keil and Delitzsch, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon*, pp.499-500.
12. Longman, *Song of Songs*, p.41.
13. Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, p.235.
14. Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction*, p.259.
15. Op.cit., p.259.
16. Op.cit., p.259.
17. There are other arguments in favor of this interpretation including the discovery of other examples of love poetry in other ancient Near Eastern cultures. As Tremper Longman notes, "The Song of Songs did not appear in a literary and cultural vacuum." Tremper Longman, *Song of Songs: NICOT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), p.210.
18. Longman, *Song of Songs*, p.44. It should be noted that there are two views among those who advocate the poetic method of interpretation. Some commentators view the Song as a unified poem, while others, like Longman, view it as an anthology of poems much like the Book of

Psalms is an anthology of songs or the Book of Proverbs is an anthology of wisdom.

19. Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, p.241.
20. For a good example of how to develop these typological/messianic connections to Christ from the Songs of Songs see James M. Hamilton, Jr., "The Messianic Music of the Song of Songs: A Non-Allegorical Interpretation," *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol.68, no.2, Fall 2006, pp.331-45.
21. Keil and Delitzsch, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon*, p.497.
22. However, some commentators disagree that this is a mere geographical reference and instead suggest that the word is a feminine form of the name "Solomon." According to these scholars, the title "Shulammite" implies that the woman is the perfect counterpart to Solomon. Commentators who maintain that this title is simply a reference to the hometown of the woman suggest that the city being referred to by this title is the ancient city of Shunem (see 1 Kings 1:1-4:15). For a further discussion of the debate surrounding the term "Shulammite," see Tremper Longman, *Song of Songs*, pp.192-193.
23. Longman, *Song of Songs*, p.16.
24. Tom Gledhill, *The Message of the Song of Songs* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), p.150.
25. Some scholars, like Iain D. Campbell, believe that in order to interpret the Song of Songs properly it is vital to identify the man as King Solomon. He suggests that identifying the male in the romance as Solomon allows us to connect the Song of Songs to the Davidic covenant. Although he makes an interesting biblical theological argument, I am not fully persuaded that we *must* conclude that the man was Solomon to derive meaning from this book. For more information on Campbell's views see his article, "The Song of David's Son: Interpreting the Song of Solomon in the Light of the Davidic Covenant," *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol.62, no.1, Spring 2000, pp.17-32.
26. While the Song does include a reference to a wedding in 3:6-11, the meaning of this passage is disputed. Some scholars believe this wedding is indeed the wedding of the two lovers, but others disagree because this passage depicts a "wedding song" regarding Solomon rather than the couple. For example, Solomon's name appears three times in these verses (v. 7, 9 and 11). While this text does seem to refer to one of Solomon's 700 weddings (1 Kings 11:3) there is a theory of interpretation which suggests that it may be referring to the wedding of the lovers. This theory maintains that the "wedding song" of Solomon was either used in the wedding ceremony of the couple or was used by the poet to indirectly, and poetically, point to the wedding of the couple. Once again it is simply impossible to be certain about the exact meaning and purpose of this wedding reference.
27. Longman, *Song of Songs*, p.60.
28. See Andrew Hwang, "New Structure of the Song of Songs," *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol.65, no.1: Spring 2003, pp. 79-111. Old Testament scholar David A. Dorsey offers a similar chiastic pattern to that of Hwang (A - 1:2-2:7; B - 2:8-17; C - 3:1-5; D - 3:6-5:1; C' - 5:2-7:10; B' - 7:11-8:4; A' - 8:5-14), see David A. Dorsey, "Literary Structuring in the Song of Songs," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, vol. 46, 1990: pp.81-96. It should be noted that not all scholars agree that a chiastic pattern is present in the Song of Songs.
29. It should be noted that this chiastic argument is not without its weaknesses. While it is clear that the consummation seems to occur between 3:6 and 5:1, there are other passages in the Song which also seem to indicate a sexual encounter has occurred. However, it is important to note that allusion to a sexual encounter does not necessarily mean that the encounter actually happened.
30. Gledhill, *The Message of the Song of Songs*, p.147.
31. Op.cit., p.147.
32. Charles Spurgeon, *The Most Holy Place* (Pasadena, CA: Pilgrim Publishing, 1974), p.89.

PURITAN[1] PARLIAMENTARY PREACHING AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR TODAY

Jim Davison

Jim Davison is a member of Great Victoria Street Baptist Church (Belfast), a member of the Irish Baptist Historical Society, and a visiting lecturer in Church History at Belfast Bible College and the Irish Baptist College.

Background

The period in which the sermons preached before Parliament, known as the "Fast Sermons", were delivered has, with justification, led the historian Christopher Hill to describe it as, "The decisive century in English history, the epoch in which the middle ages ended."[2] Although Hill is speaking of the century in general, he further states that "within the seventeenth century the decisive decades are those between 1640 and 1660."[3] R. C. Richardson in *The Debate on the English Revolution Revisited* concurs as he quotes with approval from Thomas Hobbes, "If in time, as in place there were degrees of high and low, I verily believe that the highest of time would be that which passed between the years 1640 and 1660."[4]

This assessment of the two decades between 1640 and 1660 cannot be seriously questioned. Many significant events took place during these two decades, but the notable major event was the Civil War. Richardson makes the very valid point that there had been civil wars in England before the seventeenth century, "but in the seventeenth century for the first time a defeated king was denounced as a traitor, put on trial in the name of his people, found guilty and executed."[5] This is the context in which preaching before Parliament took place as part of its monthly Fast programme. But we must go a little further back to find the roots of preaching before Parliament.

The Puritan desire for godliness in the individual and the family is well known, but this desire went beyond the individual, the family and even local communities. It was a desire which could not be satisfied until the whole of society was living a life of true godliness to the glory of God, and as a witness to the rest of the Christian world. It was not only the Puritan ministers who were calling for national days of fasting as a means of urging the nation to confess its sin and seek the forgiveness of God. The Puritan gentry too were

calling for the same thing.

Such days had been called at various times by royal command and by church authority since the earliest days of Elizabeth's reign, though the Queen had no great liking for them. Elizabeth had made this clear at the opening session of Parliament in January 1581 when her new Lord Chancellor, Sir Thomas Bromley, gave a special admonition to the House "not to deal with matters touching her Majesty's person or estate, or touching religion."[6]

However, an indication of the extent Puritanism had made inroads into lay society, at this time can be seen in the action of the House of Commons after this admonition. On the day following, 21st January, Paul Wentworth placed a motion before the Commons for "a public Fast, with prayer and preaching to be exercised by this House for the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, to the furtherance of his glory, the preservation of her Majesty, and the better direction of the actions of this House."[7] That a major part of the Commons was in sympathy with the motion is indicated by the fact that the only division recorded related to whether the Fast should be private or public, with those in favour of a public Fast winning the vote by fifteen votes (115 to 100).

This action by the Puritans in Parliament was undoubtedly sincere, for they invariably sought God's guidance in all things, but as soon as Elizabeth was informed of the decision her response was decisive. On Tuesday, 24th January, the Speaker of the Commons expressed his abject sorrow for having permitted the original motion, and reported upon "her Majesty's great misliking of the proceeding of this House." He also urged the House to apologise for its conduct and to confine itself to "matters proper and pertinent for this House to deal in" and omit "all superfluous and unnecessary motions and arguments."[8]

Vice-Chamberlain Hatton delivered a further severe rebuke from the Queen. First, he indicated her Majesty's "great admiration of the rashness of this House in committing such an apparent contempt against her Majesty's express command." Hatton then stated that while the Queen "liked well of fasting, prayer and sermons...no public Fast could be appointed but by her, and therefore [their action] impeached her jurisdiction."[9] But was it true that Elizabeth really liked sermons, in the way suggested? Surely her contention that three preachers were quite sufficient for each county in England, her opposition to and suppression of the gatherings called "prophesyings", and her treatment of Archbishop Grindal for his defence of preaching all indicate her dislike of preaching. Interestingly, there appears to be no direct comment on that part of Paul Wentworth's motion, which called for a sermon to be preached before the beginning of each day's business.

At the end of this lambasting the Commons resolved to tender to her Majesty "the most humble submission of this whole House, with their like most humble suit unto her Majesty to remit and pardon their said error and contempt." The next day, 25th January Hatton informed the House that their

plea for pardon for their "offence and contempt" was "lovingly and graciously"[10] accepted by the Queen. Elizabeth's prompt and decisive response to the motion not only humiliated the Puritan party in Parliament, it also devastated it, to the extent that the next motion of a similar nature did not come until the reign of James I, and when it did come it originated in a completely different context.

On 8th April, 1614, it was proposed that "all members may, before a certain day, receive the Communion." The *Commons Journal* for that date records three reasons:

1) it would strengthen the bond between King and Commons;

2) those that take it [would be free] from unjust suspicion;

3) it would keep the Trojan horse out of the House.

It was also stated that "whosoever shall not then receive [the sacrament] shall not after be admitted into the House, till he has received [it]."[11] The proposal was designed to enable the Puritans and other Protestants to demonstrate their loyalty. John F. Wilson makes the point that this test of the sacrament "would clear them from suspicion. Romanists, on the other hand, would be forced to reveal their allegiance by disqualifying themselves, unless they were willing to engage in hypocrisy."[12]

That both Houses held separate communion services (the Lords in the Abbey and the Commons in St. Margaret's, the parish church of Westminster) is very significant, as up to this time the two Houses had celebrated communion together in the Abbey. The Commons held their "test of loyalty" communion service on 17th April, and it can be accepted that from this date the occasional preaching services originated, in St. Margaret's, directly sponsored by the House of Commons. The pattern of separate services continued during the remaining years of the decade and "allowed the puritans to demonstrate their essential loyalty to the regime and, having done this, to develop an institution of puritan preaching before the House of Commons in the context of the national Fasts of humiliation."[13]

On 18th February, 1621, a second "test of loyalty" communion service was held. The Commons invited Dr. James Ussher to be the preacher on the day. Ussher was highly esteemed as a man of an irenic spirit; a spirit that is evident in his sermon by the "call for reconciliation with friends in spite of those real differences which might exist and divide."[14] Following the service the Commons thanked Ussher for his sermon and invited him to have it printed. This began the tradition of the Commons inviting the preachers of the Fast Sermons to have them printed. Indeed, that the Commons requested the sermon to be printed may be taken as another indication of the importance the Puritans placed on preaching.

The Fasts which took place between April 1614 and February 1621 were not general fasts as they were confined to Parliament. The last call for a general

Fast by Parliament had been in 1581, but since 1581 things had changed to the extent that in February 1624 Sir Edward Cecil proposed a general Fast for the whole nation, with a collection which would be "very bountiful to the poor [in the Low Countries]."[15] With the consent of the King being granted the Fast was held on the last day of February 1624. After this the practice became more regular. Wilson is persuasive in his argument that apart from the sacrament being administered, perhaps as another test of loyalty, the occasion was also construed as an "opportunity to bring the whole body under the discipline of preaching."[16]

The preacher on this occasion was Dr. Isaac Bargrave, who at that time was chaplain to Prince Charles. In his sermon Parliament is characterised as the representative of the commonwealth of England before God: "you now represent the whole body of the land, and therefore now before you approach the Altar, repent for the whole body of the land."[17] The progress from the first test of loyalty service in 1614 to the general Fast of February 1624 with its sermon's emphasis on national repentance is significant. Here, as Wilson notes, "we find the germ of the completed puritan program of preaching before the Long Parliament."[18]. Wilson goes on to stress the importance of recognising that in the later years of James' reign "the puritans regrouped their forces and planned new thrusts within the existing political and social structures,"[19]. all aimed at establishing the godly commonwealth.

This process was to continue during the reign of Charles I, with general Fasts being held at the start of each of his five Parliaments. With Fasts occurring at the start of each Parliament and on other special occasions it became reasonably straightforward for the Puritan party in the early days of the Long Parliament (Charles' fifth Parliament) to implement a specific programme of regular preaching as a means of bringing about the godly commonwealth they so desired. Indeed, the call for the initial general Fast, which took place on 17th November, 1640, was the first item of business of the Long Parliament. Further, by not having any Convocation men preach on any of the Fast occasions, it gave the Puritans a monopoly of St Margaret's pulpit. This, of course, would become more significant when the programme of monthly Fasts was implemented. Another development was the separation of the Fast days and the communion services.

Between the initial Fast and the start of the general monthly Fasts on 23rd February, 1642, there were four further days when the Commons received formal exhortations by Puritan ministers: the receiving of communion (29th November, 1640); Thanksgiving for union between England and Scotland (7th September, 1641); the anniversary of the Gun Powder Plot (5th November, 1641); and the Fast for the Irish crisis (22nd December, 1641). Wilson identifies another group of sermons, possibly preached during the spring or early summer of 1641, which "were not part of the formal preaching before

Parliament," but as Wilson notes, "they clearly anticipated, and possibly helped to create support for, the system of monthly Fast days."[20] This is a real possibility, for nothing could be described as being done by accident in the early days of the Long Parliament.

In the course of the monthly programme of Fasts, which ended in April 1649, the Commons also met with the Lords in joint sessions on special days of humiliation or thanksgiving independently, but on the same day. Depending on the particular nature of the Fasts, the purpose was to acknowledge either personal or national sins by an act of humiliation before God, or to give thanks to God for his hand of providence upon king and nation, and to seek God's guidance. With well over two hundred sermons from this time still extant, they provide a unique opportunity to analyse how lay and clerical members of the Puritan movement understood current issues and their responses to them.

The Fast Sermons of 1640-41

Turning to the sermons themselves, we note that in them the representatives of the nation are urged, unequivocally, to promote and cultivate further true religion in England. Beginning then with the two initial Fasts of 17th November, 1640, we note that the *Dedicatory Epistle*, which is shared by both sermons, sets the tone for many of the sermons that would follow:

> The God of heaven steer all your weighty consultations by his own counsel, to his own glory cover you still...and make you the most accomplished, best united, and most successful...House of Commons that ever sat in that high court; but chiefly in the effectual endeavouring of a further sanction of and stronger guard about our true palladium, the true religion, already established among us; in the perfecting of the reformation of it; in the erecting, maintaining, protecting and encouraging of an able, godly, faithful, zealous, profitable, preaching ministry, in every parish church and chapel throughout England and Wales[21]

Preaching from Jeremiah 50:5 (*Let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten*) Cornelius Burges said that "upon any notable deliverance of [God's people]...they enter anew into a solemn and strict covenant with God." On this basis Burges argues that as God was now delivering his Church from the Roman Babylon, "the most insolent, heavy, bitter, bloody enemy, that ever the Church felt," so the entering into a new covenant was necessary. For Burges the confusion of this modern Babylon "should prove the restoring of the Church. And the restoring of the Church should produce a Covenant with God."[22]

Laudianism is also cast in the role of Babylon because its innovations and its opposition to preaching had drawn a dark cloud over many parts of the land, making it incapable of covenant with God. Laudianism also caused the people

to swim in Babylon's "deepest lakes of superstition and idolatry," but they must "purge out and cast away...all idols and idolatry in particular," says Burges, for idolatry "will certainly be the destruction of King and people where ever it is entertained." Rather than destruction, "let us," urges Burges, "see Zion built up, by your industry, in perfect beauty" and "when you set upon this great business of a covenant, see that you do it out of love for God, and with all your heart."[23]

Stephen Marshall, likewise, stressed the lack of preaching and idolatry as responsible for England's trouble. His text was 2 Chronicles 15:2 (*The Lord is with you while you are with Him...but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you*). In his sermon Marshall said, "The presence of God in his Covenant of Grace with any people is the greatest glory and happiness that they can enjoy", but he believed this glory and happiness were missing in England. "Egypt was never more bespread with locusts and frogs, than our kingdom is with horrible profaneness, uncleanness, oppression [and] deceit." Indeed, urges Marshall, "see what wonderful cause we have to be abased for all the injury the land stands guilty of in abusing God, in the point of his worship." Furthermore, he said, "there has not been in all the Christian world such high affronts to the Lord's day, as of late has been in England."[24]

Was this due, Marshall wondered, "to the negligence and corruption of our governors, or to the want of a preaching maintenance?" Has neglect of preaching been "one main cause of the ill success of so many former parliaments?" If so, then "the special end of your meeting this day is to afflict your souls before God, that . . . you might seek a right way for yourselves, and the weighty affairs of his Majesty and the whole state." If they fail, "[you] may be guiltier than the very authors of our mischiefs, who have been firm to their own principles in bringing them in: and you, contrary to your light and office, do further them, if you do not withstand them." The authority of Scripture is emphasised by Marshall as he brings his sermon to its close: "This is the sceptre whereby Christ rules: The dwelling of his Word with his people...There shall nothing hurt nor destroy where Christ's sceptre rules."[25]

In both of these sermons two things are to be noted:

1) God's willingness to draw near to his people by way of a covenant, which will "bind them hand and foot, soul and body to the Lord forever;"[26] and

2) the insistence that Parliament establish a maintained preaching ministry throughout the nation. Marshall actually sought to quantify the need when he said:

> I must tell you that nine out of ten thousand parishes, which they say are in England, I believe there are many thousands, which these eighty years have not had the blessing to enjoy (at least any long time) a settled, faithful preaching ministry. So that I believe (and I somewhat speak from experience) that many thousands, if not thousands of thousands, know not the right hand from the left, in the very principles of the doctrine of Christ.[27]

Of the two sermons preached on 29th November, 1640, only John Gauden's was printed, although both preachers (John Morley was the other preacher) were invited to have their respective sermon printed.[28] Gauden's sermon, *The Love of Truth and Peace*, was based on Zechariah 8:19. Gauden reminded his hearers of what he calls "the distemper of our age," which is nothing less than that the love of many (if not most) is grown cold to both truth and peace. Because of this they were "called together by his sacred majesty and deputed by the country, to be counsellors, and vindicators of truth and love." In this context Gauden speaks as "a messenger from the God of truth and peace; seeking to kindle and inflame such a love of them [truth and peace], as may be most happy to your own souls and most beneficial to our Church and State."[29]

Like the sermons of Burges and Marshall, Gauden emphasised the necessity of a true preaching ministry, when he declared, "Show your love by using all means to plant and nourish truth, by setting up the lights of good and painful preachers in the dark and obscure corners of the land." However, this must not be done in a shoddy manner. "Never flatter yourselves," said Gauden, "that the lamps of the temple will burn at all, or but very dimly and poorly if you supply them not with sufficient oil to enliven themselves and enlighten others." He also reminds his hearers of the value of a true preaching ministry: "There is no engine you can invent so efficient, to batter down and demolish the adverse party or to secure the prosperity of our Church and State."[30]

This insistence on a true preaching ministry is echoed, along with the symbolism of Babylon in a sermon, not one of the 'Fast Sermons', preached before sundry members of Parliament in the spring of 1641 by William Bridge on Revelation 14:8 (*Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city*). In this sermon, Bridge sees the Babylon referred to in the text as the Roman church: "by this late Babylon, we understand the Church of Rome; not as confined within her walls, but as by her merchants she trades with and puts off her commodities to other kingdoms...and those that symbolize with her." Here Bridge is thinking of the Laudian church with all its "innovations and traditions of men, under which the Church of Christ had suffered a long time."[31]

The evidence for Bridge was twofold:

1) the lack of a preaching ministry. "What reformed church is there in all the world that ever knew so many suspended ministers as England? Speak, O Sun, whether in all your travels from one end of heaven to the other, you did ever see so many silenced ministers as you have seen here." To correct this silence Bridge refers to the angel flying *in the midst of heaven having the everlasting gospel* (v.6) and says, "let there be an angel sent, that is a ministry flying in the midst of heaven, that is openly, and not by stealth, preaching the everlasting gospel to every place and congregation, then will Babylon fall."[32] The message was unambiguous: Parliament must send forth ministering angels

throughout the nation as a means of bringing about Babylon's fall.

2) The lack of scriptural church government. Citing Ezekiel 43:10-11, Bridge says, "If you would be ashamed of your own iniquities, God will show you the form of his house." Expanding on this last comment Bridge says, "It is with you...right worthy and beloved, to see that all the ordinances of Jesus Christ, be rendered to the churches in their native beauty, and that all the relics, and remains of Babylon be quite removed." For "true marble needs no painting and God's ordinance is all marble."[33]

It is clear that Bridge believed Parliament was capable of completing the reformation from these words: "Never did England see a parliament more fitted for the service and work of God than this now is: a quiver so full of chosen and polished shafts for the Lord's work." The present opportunity must be grasped, because an opportunity once lost is never recovered. Therefore, says Bridge, "I beseech you in Christ's stead let the reformation be full and perfect, and let every man say: Babylon is fallen."[34]

The same point was made by Marshall and Jeremiah Burroughs when they preached before Parliament on 7th September, 1641. For both of these preachers 1641 was a year rich in God's mercy to England. In this year, said Marshall, "wherein we looked to have been a wonder to all the world in our desolations...God has made us a wonder to the world in our preservation: giving us in one year a return of the prayers of forty and forty years." Continuing in the same vein Marshall says, "[T]his year have we seen broken the yokes which lay upon our liberties, religion, and conscience; the intolerable yokes of [the] Star Chamber and [the] terrible High Commission."[35]

In his sermon, *Sions Joy*, Burroughs outlines the reasons for the days of mourning, which he says are now past, before he turns to the main subject of his sermon, which is "joy and this easies the work much...[For] Jerusalem is a vision of peace; rejoice we that England and Scotland are visions of peace...Rejoice therefore and let us be glad for this is our Jerusalem." From the text Burroughs states three propositions, which he then expounds. They are:

1) "Gracious hearts love Jerusalem, even when it is in a mourning condition;"

2) "God has times to rejoice the hearts of mourners for his Church;" and

3) "when God comes in with mercy for Jerusalem then God will have his saints to rejoice, to be glad with joy ."[36]

Following this time of thanksgiving and joyfulness, things began to deteriorate in the parliamentary cause, especially as news of the Irish rebellion reached London. Thus on the anniversary of the Gun Powder Plot Burges' sermon was of a more fiery nature than those by Marshall and Burroughs as he strikes out at the evils of Romanism and other enemies of God's Church. Burges reminds his hearers that they had "expressed many brave and noble resolutions of giving God's business the precedence" in all their affairs. But

Burges accuses his hearers of dragging their feet in respect to God's work when he says, "Matters of religion lie a bleeding: all government and discipline of the church is laid in her grave." Both "schismatics and frantic sectaries glory in her ashes, making her fall their own rising to mount our pulpits, to offer strange fire, [and] to expel the most eminent ministers in the kingdom...so as in a short time they will not leave us the face of a church."[37]

All this is happening, laments Burges, and "no course is taken to suppress their fury and to reduce them to order, which (as things now stand) will never be, till you put your hands to the cure." To assist Parliament in effecting the cure Burges recommends the setting up of a "free synod of grave ministers of this nation."[38] This recommendation was echoed by Edmund Calamy in *England's Looking-Glasse*, and Marshall in *Reformation and Desolation*, two Fast Day Sermons for the Irish crisis delivered on 22nd December. Calamy also echoed Burges' sadness at the many divisions in the nation: "The house of the Lord lies waste...The garden of the nation is overgrown with weeds, and there are not only unprofitable, but hurtful trees planted in this garden." Because of this dreadful state, Calamy urges his hearers to let their "eyes gush down with rivers of tears...in humiliation and repentance."[39]

Marshall used the story of Josiah to explain that Parliament, like the young king, had been raised up by God "in the darkest midnight of apostasy...to attempt glorious things for his name." This is to be done by the "purging of his house, and the establishing of this great people in the peace of the Gospel." However, as Marshall reminded his hearers, Josiah's endeavours came to nothing because the people's hearts were not right (Jeremiah 3:10). So now, laments Marshall, "the body of the nation makes little other use of all the mercies of this last year, but to abuse all the liberties procured both for Church and Commonwealth, to greater and bolder sinning against God." Indeed, says Marshall, the "*vox populi* is that many of the nobles, magistrates, knights and gentlemen, and persons of great quality, are arrant traitors and rebels against God."[40]

The Monthly 'Fast Sermons' (1642)

The same deep concerns were expressed when Calamy and Marshall preached at the inaugural monthly Fast Day on 23rd February, 1642. In the epistle to his sermon *God's Free Mercy to England*, Calamy indicated the benefit of holding monthly days of fasting and humiliation: "we are likely to be blessed by the providence of God...with twelve national, solemn, public Fasts every year." "Every Fast," says Calamy, "will be as a gate to let us in, into a part of the New Jerusalem of mercy, and happiness promised to the people of God here upon the earth." Calamy introduces his sermon by indicating the religious significance of such days: "Now my purpose is to lay the sins of England against God in one scale, and the mercies of God to England in the

other scale, and call upon you this day to be humbled, and ashamed, and broken in heart before the Lord."[41]

Calamy's approach was moderate as he noted that the "new English reformation had been carried out in a peaceable, parliamentary way."[42] Marshall, however, in his offering (*Meroz Cursed*, Judges 5:23) was more direct and fiery as he spoke out against those whom he describes as "neuters". Quoting Jesus' words "He that is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30), Marshall proclaimed loud and clear that "the Lord acknowledges no neuters." For Marshall "all people are cursed or blessed according as they do or do not join their strength and give their best assistance to the Lord's people against their enemies." The conclusion was ominous: "God's blessing is upon them that come to help him: Meroz, and with Meroz all others are cursed, who come not out to help the Lord against the mighty."[43] On this basis Marshall urged Parliament to ensure that it was on the Lord's side, the side of blessing. This was to be done by the establishment of the Church on a secure foundation, by having the true religion firmly established throughout the nation.

The way to establishing the Church on a secure foundation, of course, was by calling an assembly of divines to assist Parliament in this work. The first firm step towards calling a synod was the *Grand Remonstrance*. In February 1642 the House of Commons began to move towards the realization of its proposal, with knights and burgesses being ordered to suggest the names of such ministers as would be fit to serve in an assembly of this sort. It was then resolved on 26th March that the Grand Committee for Religion, which had been set up in the early days of the Long Parliament, would meet "to consider what is fit to be done for the present in the matter of religion, and what will be further necessary to be done in the future."[44]

For Burges, however, this progress was not fast enough, and he addressed the issue in his sermon at the monthly Fast on 30th March. The doctrine expounded by Burges was clearly stated: "When a people have so far provoked the Lord, as to draw down great plagues upon themselves or others; yet then, their duty is to labour unto a thorough repentance, as expecting salvation in the midst of desolation." Burges then went so far as to suggest that the rebellion in Ireland was to be seen as divine punishment because of Parliament's failure to convene a "Synod or assembly...the last summer."[45] The purpose of the sermon was to exhort Parliament to repent and move forward and call an assembly with urgency.

On the same day Simon Ashe also expressed the need for an assembly when he commended to Parliament the type of men who should be members of it: "Men of approved piety, whose hearts are awed with God's fear and unmoveably bent to advance his glory. Scripture men...Such, who may come to the consultations as white paper, capable of those impressions which the evidence and power of truth shall imprint."[46]

When it came to the April monthly Fast Thomas Goodwin and Joseph Caryl were the preachers. Goodwin's *Zerubbabel's Encouragement to Finish the Temple* (Zechariah 4:6-9) was a forthright endeavour to encourage his hearers to continue the progress of reformation despite fierce opposition. Like his fellow Puritans Goodwin acknowledged that the first reformers had set the Church in England on a sure doctrinal foundation. Nevertheless, however glorious the first reformation had been, further reformation was still required, not in doctrine but in worship and discipline. In a picturesque way Goodwin explains why:

> As in a new plantation, which if men were to make in another world...their first care would be to provide necessaries for their subsistence as they are men; to have corn for bread, cattle for meat, and the like; but in matters of order and government they think of afterwards, and often fall into the right by seeing their errors by degrees. Think not much, therefore, that men call for (as most men do) a reformation of some things amiss in matters of worship and discipline.[47]

The reason for "things amiss" is that "[God] oft-times suffers mountains of opposition to lie in the way of them" that his "power in bringing things to pass for his church may be seen and acknowledged, and that his enemies may be confounded." In the context of building the temple, Goodwin explains that the greatest of mountains (Babylon) had stood in the way of laying the foundation of this temple, but it was overcome. The Samaritan faction who sought to hinder the finishing and perfecting of the temple were also unsuccessful. For Goodwin, God's love for his church is such that "no mountain of opposition can stand before it, to hinder the enlargement and building of it up...[H]is love to his churches, holding forth his name and worship in the world, is such, as nothing shall withstand the repairing and perfecting of them."[48]

Following this Goodwin says, "if the worship of God and the government of his house, and every ordinance thereof, tend so much to his glory,"[49] then God will not fail to be engaged in the perfecting of it. The means to this end, Goodwin reminds his hearers, lies in their godly resolution to use their "utmost endeavours to establish learned and preaching ministers, with a good and sufficient maintenance, throughout the whole kingdom, wherein many dark corners are miserably destitute of the means of salvation."[50] Goodwin's final charge to his hearers is clear:

> Purge and reform the temple, though you die for it in the doing of it...Do your duty, and serve your generation...Be strong, and let not your hands be weak, for your works shall be rewarded...Be strong, and of good courage, and do it: fear not...for the Lord God will be with you; he will not fail you, nor forsake you.[51]

Obediah Sedgwick in his *England's Preservation*, preached on 25th May,

1642, defined the work necessary to continue the reformation: "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns" (Jeremiah 4:3). Fallow ground, say Sedgwick, is "the sinful state of a person or nation," which is broken up "when the Almighty and gracious God...comes with his Word and Spirit and...enters into the heart or soul of a sinner by irresistible convincings and efficacious humblings...[and roots] up the dominion and love of all sins." Sowing is accomplished by sending "labourers into the field...to plant the land with a heart-breaking ministry: all will come to nothing unless this is done." Then, after urging his hearers to be "serious and courageous" in the erecting of a settled ministry, Sedgwick holds out this promise: "Go on in this breaking work and prosper...[because] no man ever did anything for God and lost by it or to his Church, but who gained by it."[52]

The theme of a settled ministry is taken up again by Sedgwick in handling the second part of his text – "and sow not among thorns" – as he sets out eleven works that must be continued to ensure that a good harvest is forthcoming. Two of these works are "the settling of a faithful and laborious ministry," including "an honourable maintenance and encouragement of it."[53] Sedgwick, like so many of those who preached before the Long Parliament in its early years, highlights the great necessity of a preaching ministry as a means of bringing about the godly Commonwealth they all so desired.

This insistence on a preaching ministry was the same primary theme that had been preached by Puritan preachers for many years. Likewise, their sermons insisted on the fundamental necessity of everyone submitting to God's sovereign rule as revealed in Scripture, and as a pattern for living a God-honouring life. That the nation was not submissive necessitated two things:

1) the call to repentance, not by individuals only but also collectively by the whole nation, and

2) reform for the future. "Divided from one another, both were ineffectual and potentially heretical. Conjoined, they defined the religious practices appropriate to a nation or an individual in explicit covenant with God."[54]

On 27th July, 1642, Thomas Hill (*The Trade of Truth Advanced*) and Edward Reynolds (*Israel's Petition in Time of Trouble*) preached the last two monthly Fast Sermons before the start of the Civil War. In his sermon Hill draws attention by way of queries, to three things referred to at the beginning of this article:

1) personal godliness;

2) family godliness, and

3) national godliness.

Three questions compose the first query:

1) "[Are] your own hearts possessed with the power of truth?"

2) "Has God's word a throne in your conscience?"

3) "What fruitful knowledge have you got in the mystery of doctrinal and practical godliness?"

Turning to the second query Hill asks, "Have you set up truth in your own families?" This is followed by a plea, "Let not your chambers [households] be academies only, for the advancement of learning; or courts for the daily dispatch of public affairs, but temples for the worship of God."

Finally, Hill presents his third query: "Have you employed and improved your public interests to help forward the trade of truth, to promote religion in the liberty, purity, and power of it?"[55].

Analysis of the Fast Sermons

It is generally accepted by modern writers on the Fast Sermons that the call for a general Fast in respect of a particular crisis or a particular triumph by those sympathetic to the Puritan cause was natural and perfectly predictable. Some of these writers, however, have also argued that the sermons preached before the House of Commons on these days of fasting in respect of thanksgiving or humiliation, particularly in the early years of the Long Parliament, were specifically used by the political leaders within the Puritan movement as a means of announcing their policy. One such writer is H. Trevor-Roper, who insists that particular sermons were used specifically to "foretell the death of Strafford; then Laud; declare the civil war;...and finally the most dramatic, the most revolutionary gesture of all: the execution of the king himself."[56].

Commenting on the two initial monthly Fast Sermons, by Burges and Marshall, Trevor-Roper argues that "the function of the first sermons was to lay down the policy of Parliament, and the preachers chosen already knew their parts."[57]. He further says that by stressing the need for a covenant the two preachers were laying down "the political conditions of parliamentary survival."[58]. Mrs. Ethyn Kirby concurs when she writes that while it is problematical to link the emphasis upon a covenant with pressure for a covenant with the Scots it becomes more feasible when "the rapprochement between such Scots as [Robert] Baillie and Samuel Rutherford and the London ministers is remembered."[59].

Edward Hyde, a contemporary opponent of the Puritans, in reference to the first two preachers insisted that the Archbishop of Canterbury "had never so great an influence upon the counsels at court, as Dr. Burges and Mr. Marshall had then upon the Houses [of Parliament]."[60]. This sentiment is echoed by Trevor-Roper when he describes Marshall as "the most political parson of the revolution" and "the inseparable political and spiritual ally of [John] Pym."[61]. Continuing in this strain Trevor-Roper writes:

> At every stage of the revolution we can see him [Marshall]. Now he is thumping his pulpit on great occasions; now he is meeting with Pym, Hampden and Harley to prepare parliamentary tactics; now he is bustling through Westminster Hall to push voters into the Parliament....From beginning to end Marshall was the clerical tribune of the Parliament.[62]

Kirby, like Trevor-Roper, recognises a political emphasis in these sermons when she suggests that when "Marshall declared that there was one Jonas, that is Jonah, who, until he was cast out, endangered the safety of the godly; his hearers, according to their temper, undoubtedly selected Strafford or Laud for the role of Jonah."[63] However, the fact that Marshall also urged Parliament to seriously consider "what is amiss, and pluck up every plant that God has not planted"[64] would indicate that he understood the troubles in the church and nation to be much more widespread than one or two people.

Continuing with his analysis Trevor-Roper suggests that the second set of sermons (those by Gauden and Morley) "showed something of the social programme envisaged."[65] More pointedly, however, Trevor-Roper argues that the sermon *The Troublers Troubled* preached by Samuel Fairclough, "a demure and humble parson,"[66] from Suffolk, at the ordinary Commons Sunday service on 4th April, 1641, gives ample evidence that John Pym had "once again used the pulpit to declare policy."[67] According to Trevor-Roper, Pym's discovery of the army plot to rescue Strafford was the catalyst that persuaded him to act swiftly against the earl.[68]

In summarising the sermon Trevor-Roper notes that Fairclough, while insisting that all who trouble the state must have a proper trial and examination, nevertheless "with revolting relish, he repudiated in turn every argument of justice or humanity."[69] According to Trevor-Roper, "Death, only death, would satisfy the remorseless preacher, death without time for repentance on one side or for reflection on the other."[70] Furthermore, insists Trevor-Roper:

> It is hardly conceivable that this country clergyman, so submissive to his patron, so dazzled by his momentary publicity, should have dared, on his own initiative, to dictate to parliament, while the great trial was still *sub judice*, a new and more sanguinary course. And yet from that date this was the course which would be followed. The conclusion is forced upon us that Fairclough's sermon was the means of declaring a new party line.[71]

A contrary view to Trevor-Roper's thesis is suggested by Wilson in his study of parliamentary sermons and is based on the date of a sermon by William Bridge. Wilson makes the point that the sermon, *Babylon's Downfall*, by Bridge, "carries the notice that Dering's committee authorised its publication on April 6, 1641."[72] On the basis of this evidence Wilson suggests that it "might be argued that, like the sermons by Fairclough and Thomas Wilson, this one was preached on April 4."[73] It might also be argued that Bridge's sermon, on the basis of the notice referred to above, was preached before 4th April. Acceptance of either date, however, would cast doubt on Trevor-Roper's insistence that Fairclough's sermon by itself distinctly pronounced what he describes as "a decisive shift in Pym's tactics toward Strafford, apart from the more general context of [the] puritan struggle for

reform of church and commonwealth."[74]

Furthermore, and most necessary in any consideration of these sermons, it must be remembered that what these men, both preachers and parliamentarians, were about was to rid the nation of all ungodliness in whatever form they saw it. Their overriding priority was to see the wilderness turned into a garden; to ensure that Babylon was pulled down and the New Jerusalem not only erected but firmly established in its place. This last point is important for it reminds us that, while the Puritan preachers in their sermons urged their hearers to prepare for eternity, they were also very forthright in declaring the need for a life of godliness in this life. This is borne out by J. C. Spalding when he writes: "The goal of these sermons...was to produce a proper state of holiness among the people in order that the wrath of God might be averted and the blessing of God upon the nation assured."[75]

Spalding bases his argument on the premise that the sermons preached before Parliament from November 1640 to April 1649 "might be called a 'public' puritan diary," which "offers an excellent public parallel to the private puritan diary," in which "the moral successes and failures recorded in them are those of a nation rather than an individual." This is an interesting suggestion and one that can well explain the Puritan preachers' encouragement of Parliament to good works, which they regarded as necessary "for the eventual enjoyment of the good life in England in this world and not simply for a sense of assurance about eternity."[76] In other words, they endeavoured to persuade their hearers of the necessity to establish those conditions whereby God's blessing might be received here and now by the nation.

This understanding is also in harmony with the fact that in the 1640s there was no meaningful distinction between church and state; it was a church/state society. Indeed, as William Haller notes, "the continuance of ordered society was as yet inconceivable without the Christian Church, and the Church was inconceivable except as a single comprehensive institution uniform in faith and worship."[77] Therefore, for Puritan preachers to have preached any differently in the seventeenth century would not have been an option. Furthermore, the sermons preached before the Long Parliament were no different from many of the sermons preached by Puritan ministers around the country in the 1640s. For instance the symbolism of Antichrist and Babylon is much in evidence in both classes of sermon.

The Sermons' Relevance For Today

The first thing we note is that for the Puritan Christianity was not a private religion. Yes, salvation is personal, but the grace that draws sinners into a personal, saving relationship with Jesus Christ impinges on all aspects of life. It brings every aspect of human existence under divine authority and thereby

directs every human endeavour to the glory of God: in the church, in the family, in all social and political contacts, as well as in the private life of the believer. The first lesson, therefore, we must learn from these sermons is that the salvation wrought by God in the life of an individual brings before him not only the majesty and authority of God, it also presses upon him the importance of living one's life in such a way that God would be glorified. This God-honouring emphasis is surely to be stressed again and again today.

A second lesson to be learned is that we must not only speak to the Church, we must also sound forth the claims of God beyond the Church. There is not the same opportunity to present the claims of God before Parliament in the way the Puritan ministers did, but we must learn from their endeavours. It was their contention that Parliament was the magistrate appointed by God to ensure good government. For this reason the preachers before the Commons exhorted it to fulfil its duty to God (Rom. 13:1; cf. Titus 3:1). Gregg Singer states clearly the Puritan position:

> Basic in Puritan political thought is the doctrine of divine sovereignty. It was the sovereign God who created the state and gave to it its powers and functions. The earthly magistrate held his position and exercised his power by a divine decree. He was a minister of God under common grace for the execution of the laws of God among the people at large, for the maintenance of law and order, and for so ruling the state that it would provide an atmosphere favourable for the preaching of the Gospel...In Puritan political theory the magistrate derived his powers from God and not from the people. Human government was divinely ordained for the realization of the purposes of God in history. His powers did not come from the people, nor was he primarily responsible to them for the stewardship of his office.[78]

The third lesson to be learned from this *genre* of sermons is their emphasis on a preaching ministry. In an age when many would endeavour to relegate preaching to a minor role in worship, we would do well to emulate these men in their insistence on the primacy of preaching as *the* means of promoting and cultivating true godliness. Yes, they encouraged other forms of instruction, such as catechising and the discussion of sermons around the meal table, especially after Sunday morning worship. Importantly too, they stressed the reading of Scripture, which they esteemed an ordinance of God both in private and in public. But they did not account reading to be preaching. To the Puritan the word read was esteemed of more authority, but the word preached of more efficiency.

A fourth lesson we must learn is the manner in which the Puritan minister preached the Word of God. Here we find a startling contrast with many of today's sermons. In simple language they called a spade a spade. In doing so they did not allow their hearers to go away from worship under any false apprehensions, or comfortable in their sins. "Ah!" I hear you saying, "We live

in a different world today, we are more tolerant." But do we live in a more tolerant age?

To a large extent this is true, but the tolerance of the world is non-existent when it comes to the people of God presenting the truth of God, for when we do this we are told that we are bigots, fanatics and intolerant. Are we allowing the insidious ideas of the world to infiltrate our thinking to the extent that we are happy to keep quiet? Are we content to go along with a world that says there are no absolutes, especially when it comes to the Gospel? And do we live in a different world than the one the Puritans lived in?

In response to such questions as these I ask, "Is not the God of the Puritans, the God of the Bible, who is 'the same yesterday, today, and for ever' our God?" If he is, then we should seek to emulate the Puritan preachers and boldly present the claims of God to our legislators, indeed to all others. Furthermore, has sin changed in the eyes of God?

Finally, we must note that it was not preaching *per se*, but preaching which was based upon Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*). The Puritan view of Scripture is well summed up in the phrase – *vox scripturae vox dei (the voice of Scripture is the voice of God)*. For this reason Thomas Watson could say, "Think in every line you read that God is speaking to you" and William Ames could say, "The Bible sits in judgement on the individual's conscience in all its commands and promises." Indeed, such was the Puritan view of the Scriptures that Richard Sibbes could declare, "There is not anything or any condition that befalls a Christian in this life but there is a general rule in the Scriptures for it, and this rule is quickened by example." It follows from this, therefore, that each doctrine expounded must be applied. It must be set out by way of directions to the hearers so that they can apply it in their own circumstances.

Notes

1. The words "Puritan", "Puritans" and "Puritanism" are used in this article of those who sought to change the polity of the Church of England and who supported the parliamentary cause.
2. C. Hill, *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), p.13-14.
3. Op. cit., p.14.
4. R. C. Richardson, *The Debate on the English Revolution Revisited* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.1.
5. Op. cit., p.2.
6. *Commons Journals*, vol.1, pp.118-119. Hereafter cited as *C J*.
7. Op. cit., p.118.
8. Op. cit., p.118.
   Op. cit., p.119.

10. Op. cit., p.119.
11. Op. cit., p.457.
12. J. F. Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p.24.
13. Op. cit., p.25 n.12.
14. Op. cit.., p.26.
15. *C J*, pp.671, 715.
16. J.F. Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament*, p.26.
17. I. Bargrave, *A Sermon Preached before Parliament* (1624), p.17.
18. J.F. Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament*, p.28.
19. Op. cit., p.28.
20. Op. cit., p.275.
21. C. Burges and S. Marshall, "The Epistle Dedicatory" in R. Jeffs (Gen. Ed.), *Fast Sermons to Parliament*, vol.1, (London: Cornmarket Press, 1971), p.14. Hereafter cited as *Fast Sermons to Parliament*.
22. C. Burges "The First Sermon Preached before Parliament", 17th November 1640, in *Fast Sermons to Parliament*, vol.1, pp.28, 51, 22.
23. Op. cit., pp.70, 83, 84, 94, 95.
24. S. Marshall, "A Sermon before Parliament", 17th November 1640, in *Fast Sermons to Parliament*, vol.1, pp.107, 133, 134.
25. Op. cit., pp. 150, 151, 104, 149, 151-152.
26. Op. cit., p.38.
27. Op. cit., p.150.
28. *C J*, vol.2, p.40. , cf. *C J*, vol.2, pp.57-58.
29. J. Gauden, "The Love of Truth and Peace" in *Fast Sermons to Parliament*, vol.1, pp.160, 162.
30. Op. cit., p.182.
31. W. Bridge, "Babylon's Downfall" in *The Works of William Bridge*, vol.4 (Beaver Fall, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1989), pp.295, 291-292.
32. Op. cit., pp.300, 299, 302.
33. Op. cit., p.300.
34. Op. cit., pp.305, 306.
35. S. Marshall, "A Peace Offering to God" in *Fast Sermons to Parliament*, vol.1, pp.248, 253.
36. J. Burroughes, "Sions Joy" in *Fast Sermons to Parliament*, vol.1, pp.270, 272, 273, 278.
37. C. Burges, "Another Sermon Preached before Parliament" in *Fast Sermons to Parliament*, vol.1, p.396.
38. Op. cit., pp.396, 399.
39. E. Calamy, "England's Looking Glasse" in *Fast Sermons to Parliament*, vol.2, pp.64, 49.
40. S. Marshall, "Reformation and Desolation" in *Fast Sermons to Parliament*, vol.2, p.129.
41. E. Calamy, "God's Free Mercy to England" in *Fast Sermons to Parliament*, vol.2, pp.140, 141.
42. Op. cit., p.144.
43. S. Marshall, "Meroz Cursed" in *Fast Sermons to Parliament*, vol.2, pp.220, 207, 252.
44. *C J*, vol.2, pp.427, 498.
45. C. Burges, "The Necessity and Benefit of Washing the Heart" in *Fast Sermons to Parliament*, vol. 2, pp.265, 304.
46. S. Ashe, "The Best Refuge for the Most Oppressed" in *Fast Sermons to Parliament*, vol.2, p.378.
47. T. Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, vol.12, p.110.
48. Op. cit., pp.111, 113, 115.
49. Op. cit., pp.117-8.

50. Op. cit., p.118.
51. Op. cit., pp.126-7.
52. O. Sedgwick, "England's Preservation" in *The Fast Sermons*, vol.3, pp.79, 81, 92, 80-81, 102-103, 103.
53. Op. cit., pp.114, 118.
54. R. M. Norris, "The Preaching of the Assembly" in J. L. Carson and D. W. Hall (eds) *To Glorify and Enjoy God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), pp.78-79.
55. T. Hill, "The Trade of Truth Advanced" in *Fast Sermons to Parliament*, vol.3, pp.313, 314, 315.
56. H. Trevor-Roper, "The Fast Sermons of the Long Parliament" in H. Trevor-Roper, *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p.296.
57. *C J*, vol.2, p.24. The Lords chose bishops: see *Lords Journals*, vol.4, p.85.
58. H. Trevor-Roper, "The Fast Sermons of the Long Parliament", p.299.
59. E. W. Kirby, "Sermons before the Commons" in *American Historical Review*, vol.4:3, 1939, p.532.
60. Lord Clarendon, *History of Rebellion*, vol.1, edited by W. D. Macray, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), p.401.
61. H. Trevor-Roper, "The Fast Sermons of the Long Parliament", p.294.
62. Op. cit., pp.297-298.
63. E. W. Kirby, "Sermons Before the Commons", p.533.
64. S. Marshall, "A Sermon Preached before Parliament" in *Fast Sermons to Parliament*, vol.1, p.142.
65. H. Trevor-Roper, "The Fast Sermons of the Long Parliament", p.299.
66. H. Trevor-Roper, "The Fast Sermons of the Long Parliament", p.302.
67. Op. cit., p.302.
68. Op. cit., p.301.
69. Op. cit., p.302.
70. Op. cit., p.302.
71. Op. cit., p.303.
72. J. F. Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament*, p.277.
73. Op. cit., p.278.
74. Op. cit., p.278.
75. J. C. Spalding, "Sermons before Parliament (1640-1649) as a Public Puritan Diary" in *Church History*, vol.36:1, 1967, p.24.
76. Op. cit., pp.24, 25, 35.
77. W. Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism*, p.6.
78. C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History* (Phillipsburg, NJ.: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1964), pp.13-14.

THE FIVE POINTS OF LUTHERANISM?

A Tentative Proposal based upon the Experiential Theology of Dr. Martin Luther

R. E. L. Rodgers

Bob Rodgers has been involved in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe for many years.

Introduction

The *Five Points of Calvinism* have become well-established in Historical Theology and Church History. Drawn up by The Synod of Dort in 1618, they were a response to *The Five Points of Arminianism*. The latter were cast in the form of a 'Remonstrance' presented to the Dutch Parliament following the death of Jacob Arminius in 1610. Until then, the major Protestant Churches in Europe had subscribed to the Belgic and Heidelberg Confessions of Faith. Recognizing significant differences in their theology, particularly with regard to five key doctrines, the Arminians formulated their protest. The Synod of Dort sat for 154 sessions over a seven month period before issuing its reaffirmation of the recognized confessional position.

Now, if we have *The Five Points of Arminianism* and *The Five Points of Calvinism*, is it possible to speak in terms of *The Five Points of Lutheranism?* This essay presents an attempt to identify five key doctrines that lie at the heart of Martin Luther's experiential theology.

I THE DOCTRINE OF SIN

The Word of God taught Martin Luther his own heart. It stressed his sin. In those early years, between 1505 and 1515, the thing that worried Luther most was not the Church, nor the need for reform, nor religion as such. What worried him more than all else was Luther. It was Luther's soul, Luther's sin and his need of salvation. The Word of God spoke powerfully to his soul and Romans 1:18 cried out from the printed page. His great and fundamental problem was, "How can I find a Gracious God?" Luther knew that his sin had alienated him from God and that sin merits and attracts the wrath of God issuing in eternal punishment. Here, then, was the basic problem – Martin Luther was a sinner!

Writes Luther: "Though I lived as a monk beyond reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience." He was driven to despair. No amount of flagellation would bring relief. Often, after whipping himself, he would ask, "Who knows whether such things are pleasing to God?"

In Luther's emphasis upon and his enumeration and confession of sins of which he felt himself guilty, we may identify a basic problem. That problem, springing from the teaching of the Church of Rome, lay in his failure, at this point, to distinguish between sin inherited and sins committed in thought, word and deed.

Here, then, emphasis must be placed upon the doctrine of original sin as it is taught in the Word of God. This is markedly different from the teaching of Rome as accepted initially by Luther. According to Rome, original sin does not affect us after baptism, but Luther came to see that this is contrary to biblical teaching. Graphic as ever, here is how the Reformer speaks of the Fall:

> So Adam and Eve were pure and healthy. They had eyes so sharp they could have seen through a wall and ears so good they could have heard anything two miles away. All the animals were obedient to them: even the sun and moon smiled at them. But then the devil came and said, "You will become just like the gods", and so on. They reasoned, "God is patient. What difference would one apple make?" Snap! Snap! And it lay before them. It's hanging us all yet by the neck.

There we have Luther's emphasis upon the Fall and its consequences. Sin springs from the Fall so that the natural man is born in a state of alienation from God. This alienation cannot simply be construed in terms of a passive weakness or a lack of good. It is, rather, "a seething rebellion" for this "atrocity of sin" has vitiated man's entire being. It is an "uncontrollable energy which cannot be conquered by ordinary means."

The unregenerate man stands before God naked and devoid of anything whereby he might hope to commend himself to his Creator. Listen to Luther as he describes man's changed condition. He describes God the Creator as "an artist like unto none" and his creation as something to inspire our worship and to make it sing "Glory to God in the highest."

> This is the very heart of worship but the natural man has no part in it at all. For the World, since Adam's fall, knows neither God nor his creatures. Ho, what fine, fair, happy thoughts would man have had were he not fallen! Adam and his children would have gloried in all this but now since the pitiable fall, the Creator is dishonoured and reviled.

Luther here underlines the difference between *root* and *fruit*, between *sin* and *sins*. We are not sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners. In the Roman system, however, it was *sins* that were being remembered, listed,

confessed and *forgiven*. The emphasis was upon the *fruit* and not the *root*.

This biblical understanding of the doctrine of sin found powerful expression in Luther's preaching and writings. Says Wood, "Like all true Gospel preaching, Luther's message moved within the twin orbits of Sin and Grace." Mackinnon could state that Gospel preaching in the evangelical sense began with Luther. Of the Epistle to the Romans, the Wittenberg professor wrote:

> The Sum and Substance of this letter is: to pull down, to pluck up and to destroy all wisdom and righteousness of the flesh...and to implant, establish and make large the reality of Sin.

It need not surprise us, then, what Kooiman says of Luther's lectures on Romans, "The central motif of these lectures is that God's Word causes us to see our sin." This, in turn, enables one authority to say with conviction that Luther's commentary on Romans is "a Reform Manifesto". If that be so, and if its central motif concerns the doctrine of Sin, there may be justification in regarding that doctrine as the first of *The Five Points of Lutheranism*.

II THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL

"How can I find a gracious God?" That question was paramount on the heart and mind of Martin Luther when the Word of God convinced him of his sin. It taught him that he was a sinner both by nature and by practice. Luther despaired. What added to his despair was the awful fact that there was absolutely nothing he could will or do to gain salvation. His will was enslaved by sin – his will was bound. Ebeling reminds us that "Luther came to realise the radical bondage of the will...as soon as he comprehended the pure gospel."

The Word of God spoke powerfully to Luther. The natural man will not come to Christ and, indeed, cannot come. He is in bondage to sin and Satan. Only God in Christ who is the Truth can set the prisoner free. Luther saw the idea of free-will as asserting itself in opposition to the free-will or determination of God, and he could not abide such effrontery. Says Luther, "The best and infallible preparation and the sole disposition to grace is the eternal election and predestination of God." Just as man cannot will to come to Christ, Luther would say, neither can he be driven. It is God's work: "God alone does this, coming to dwell beforehand in the heart."

Increasingly, Luther preached and wrote against a doctrine that he regarded as false. In 1516 he said, "The will of man without Grace is not free but enslaved." In 1517, the year of the posting of the Ninety-five Theses, he wrote,

> It is not true that the free effort of man is able to decide on either of two opposed courses. Rather, it is not free at all but captive. It is not true that the will is able by nature to follow right guidance

In 1518, at Heidelberg, he emphasised the doctrine again: "To speak of free-will after The Fall is mere words. If it does what lies in its power (i.e. free-will) it commits mortal sin."

Luther's doctrine of the bondage of the Will was condemned as heretical in the Papal Bull of Excommunication. Listen to Luther as he replies to the Pope:

> Free-Will is, in reality, a fabrication, a mere turn of phrase without reality. Again, free-will, which is only apparent with regard to us and to temporal things, disappears in the sight of God.

The fact that Luther based his doctrine upon Scripture carried no weight with the Pope. Indeed, Pope Hadrian had written to Fredrick the Wise telling him not to be swayed by the fact that Luther quoted Scripture. "So does every heretic," wrote the Pope. Nonetheless, a classic example of Luther's dependence upon God's Word is evident in his exposition of such themes as the Bondage of the Will when he debated at Heidelberg. One authority states that Luther appealed to Scripture "in almost every other sentence of the proofs".

For Luther, this doctrine was not only scriptural but also intensely theological. He refused to place it in the category of metaphysics as others tried to do. Indeed, because it was both scriptural and theological, it was regarded by Luther – and by all the Reformers – as "the connecting link between the doctrines of original sin and of divine grace". Luther believed fervently that the whole gospel of God's grace was bound up with this doctrine of the Bondage of the Will. In his reply to the work of Erasmus - *On The Freedom of the Will*, which had been written expressly in opposition to the German reformer – Luther thanked Erasmus for not bothering him with more extraneous issues, for seeing "the hinge on which all turns" and for having "aimed at the vital spot." Luther's teaching was biblical, theological and evangelical. Nevertheless, this vital doctrine was condemned by the Council of Trent which pronounced an anathema upon all "who say that the free-will of man was lost and extinguished after the Fall of Adam".

Luther's reply to Erasmus was entitled *De Servo Arbitrio* and this has proved to be "one of the most enduring monuments of evangelical doctrine, a masterpiece in the realm of polemics, dogmatics and exegesis". This polemical *tour de force* not only crushed the specious arguments of the Dutch humanist, but exercised a profound influence upon the doctrine of the Reformation and beyond. Luther, himself, regarded it as his best work and expressed his opinion that the doctrine of the bondage of the will is at "the very heart of the Gospel." As such, it is involved in the doctrines of original sin; the total depravity of man; the sovereignty of God and human responsibility; the doctrine of predestination; and the scriptural teaching concerning regeneration. Of Luther's masterpiece, H.J. Iwand has written, "Whoever puts this book down

without having realized that evangelical theology stands or falls with the doctrine of the bondage of the will has read it in vain."

The teaching in *The Bondage of the Will* is absolutely consistent with Luther's doctrine of Christian liberty. The latter was expressed very clearly, for example, in his work *On The Freedom of the Christian,* published in 1520. Nevertheless, in that treatise on *Freedom*, the Reformer clearly states, "Freewill is an empty word." This, of course, was consistent with Luther's own experience. In his great struggle with sin he had been convinced by the Word of God that there was nothing he could will or do to save himself. That Word cried out to the sinner, "It is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." It taught him man's inability in such passages as John 5:40, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life" and John 6:44, 65, "No man can come to Me except the Father who hath sent me draw him."

It is no wonder, then, that B.B. Warfield should assert that "*The Bondage of the Will* is a dialectic and polemic masterpiece" which is, in fact, "the embodiment of Luther's reformation conceptions, the nearest thing to a systematic statement of them that he ever made...it is...in a true sense, the manifesto of the Reformation." All the Reformers were of one mind concerning this scriptural teaching "which humbles man, strengthens faith and glorifies God."

On that last point, we must allow Gordon Rupp to have the final word. He describes the doctrine as "the finest and most powerful *Soli Deo Gloria* to be sung in the whole period of the Reformation."

III THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

In the experiential theology of Martin Luther, the doctrine of the righteousness of God occupies a pivotal position. He regarded this teaching as of fundamental importance in the Christian message. Here, we are right at the heart of the Gospel. On the one hand, *Sin*. On the other hand, *Salvation*. How could Martin Luther, the Sinner, find Salvation? How could he find a gracious God? He found that the answer lies in the doctrine of the righteousness of God!

God Against Man?

Before Luther came to faith in Christ, the term *the righteousness of God* troubled him greatly and repeatedly. He had encountered it in his study of the Psalms. There it was, for example, in Psalm 31:1 and again in 71:2. With his heart and mind unenlightened, Luther completely misunderstood the scriptural teaching and it drove him to distraction. Listen to him as he bears testimony to his reaction to his reading of such passages of the Word of God:

> When under the Papacy, I read 'In Thy righteousness deliver me' (Ps 31:1), and, 'in thy truth', I thought at once that this righteousness was an avenging anger, namely, The Wrath of God. I hated Paul with all my heart when I read that the righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel (Romans 1:16, 17).

Now, if he hated the messenger, he certainly hated the message itself. He tells us how Romans 1:17 "stood in his way":

> For I hated that word 'righteousness of God' which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Luther hated the messenger and the message itself, but he also tells us that he hated God whose Word it was:

> I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly. I was angry with God and said, 'As if, indeed, it is not enough that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the Law of Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the Gospel and also by the Gospel threatening us with His righteousness and wrath.'

There, Luther equates "righteousness and wrath" and "law and punishment". He tells us how he

> made no distinction between the Law and the Gospel. I regarded both as the same thing and held that there was no difference between Christ and Moses except the times in which they lived and their degrees of perfection.

This struggle of Luther's with regard to the righteousness of God was one of titanic proportions. Instinctively, he related the idea to the Law. He interpreted it in an *active* sense related to the wrath of God and concluded that the righteous God was against man.

God for Man!

In the grace and mercy of God, Luther was delivered from the bondage of sin. His mind was enlightened and his eyes were opened so that he realized how he had misinterpreted the Scripture. Romans 1:17, for example, bore a quite different message as he himself explains:

> God had mercy on me and I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that gift of God by which a righteous man lives, namely, faith and that this sentence – 'The Righteousness of God is revealed in The Gospel' – is passive,

> indicating that the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: 'The righteous shall live by faith'. Now I felt that I had been reborn altogether and had entered Paradise.

Now, instead of loathing Romans 1:17, he found that it "helped" and "cheered" him:

> There I saw what righteousness Paul was talking about. Earlier in the text I read 'righteousness.' I related the abstract ('righteousness') with the concrete ('the righteous One') and became sure of my cause. I learned to distinguish between the righteousness of the Law and the righteousness of the Gospel.

Before his conversion, the term *the righteousness of God* presented to Luther's mind a picture of a Judge and of wrath, but as soon as he was born anew, the Scriptures were opened up to him in a completely new way.

> There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the Work of God, that is, what God does in us; the power of God, with which He makes us strong; the wisdom of God, with which He makes us wise; the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God

His new understanding of this vitally important doctrine opened up for Luther the rest of Scripture. No wonder, then, that one authority says that Luther "had obtained the key to the Scriptures."

The Wittenberg professor knew, of course, that this wonderful teaching "was contrary to the opinion of all the doctors." Such great truths as the righteousness of God and justification by grace through faith alone were "unknown to the academic theology of the Middle Ages". With this, Schwiebert agrees: there now shines through his expositions "the rich soul-experience through which he understood St. Paul better than had been the case for a thousand years."

With what joy did Luther embrace this biblical teaching with regard to the righteousness of God! No longer could he regard God as the Judge sitting upon a rainbow and filled with wrath. No longer could he think in terms of the righteousness of God *against* man. God in Christ is a gracious Redeemer and Christ is our righteousness as well as our wisdom, sanctification and redemption (1 Cor 1:30). *God against man?* No! Now Martin could appreciate as never before that *God was for man!* Therefore, in his exposition of the Psalms, Luther can rejoice in the believer's riches: "Christ is God's Grace, mercy, righteousness, truth, wisdom, power, comfort and salvation, given us of God without any merit."

What a tremendous difference this new and correct understanding of a vital doctrine made in the life and ministry of Martin Luther. His lectures now

"breathed the atmosphere of first-century Christianity." He revelled in preaching this grand truth and it affected him in every aspect of his being. When he came to the 22nd Psalm, he identified it as relating to Christ. Yet Christ the Holy, Spotless, Sinless One is forsaken by the Father. How could this be? One authority tells us that "the answer dawned on Luther with the force of a fresh revelation." Christ, who knew no sin, was made to be sin for the sake of sinners.

Christ has taken the sin of believers and has clothed believers with the robe of his righteousness. Luther loved the Saviour with all his heart. Christ Jesus not only *brought* God's righteousness, but *He was* God's righteousness. Glory to his Name! He praises God repeatedly for this great truth and cries, "Thank God we again have His Word which pictures and portrays Christ as our righteousness." Luther had discovered that an ocean of grace lies between the concepts of wrath and mercy. His was a "comforted despair" This whole experience has been described as *Luther's Copernican Revolution in Theology* and as *Luther's discovery of a new understanding of the essence of the Christian religion*. Gerhard Ebeling could describe it as "the fundamental theological perception and the basic Reformation principle" Says Bainton, "Luther had come into a new view of Christ and a new view of God. He had come to love the suffering redeemer and the God unveiled on Calvary."

IV JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH ALONE

In the experiential theology of Martin Luther there is an inseparable connection between *the righteousness of God* and *justification by grace through faith alone*. The fundamental importance of that connection had dawned upon him when, by God's grace, his mind was enlightened regarding the true import of Romans 1:17. Listen to Luther himself as he bears witness to the grace of God in his heart and life:

> Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the Statement that 'the just shall live by his faith.' Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through Grace and sheer mercy, God justifies us through faith.

That was Luther's gospel. That was the good news that God had called him to proclaim – and proclaim it he did!

> If you have a true faith that Christ is your Saviour, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God's heart and will, that you should see pure Grace and overflowing love.

Here is a Gospel worth preaching. It is a Gospel where the emphasis is upon *grace and sheer mercy* and *pure grace and overflowing love*. Luther had come to realize that justification is an *act* of God's free grace. It is an *act* and not a *work*.

Moreover, Luther realized that Paul had borrowed his terminology from the law courts. Justification is a legal term and demonstrates the fact that God freely pardons our sins and accepts us as *righteous* in his sight. Luther rejoiced that the *ground* of our justification is not any righteousness inherent, nor our supposed good works, but, rather, the righteousness of the Redeemer imputed to us. Then Luther also realized that the *means* of our justification is faith. We are *justified freely by that faith which receives and rests in Christ only for Salvation*.

In his own experience, Luther had been convinced of the importance of this tremendous doctrine and his emphasis upon it shines through in his preaching and teaching, in his commentaries and pastoral counselling and in his translation of the Bible. We have the same emphasis in Luther's expository lectures on the Epistle to the Romans in 1515/1516. In them, justification comes to the fore even as it undergirds the Ninety-Five Theses of 1517. Says Finlayson,

> Luther had already given his exposition of Justification in his lectures on Romans of 1515 – 1516 and from that time he had been diligently preaching this doctrine from pulpit and chair and had already converted his immediate community to the evangelical faith.

In 1517, he nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg.

Justification by grace through faith alone was no mere theoretical teaching as far as Luther was concerned. He had been burdened by sin and his will had been bound. Then he experienced God's grace and mercy and began to rejoice in the doctrines of the righteousness of God and justification. Here was a vibrant faith which brought joy to the heart and peace to the soul.

The Reformer was opposed relentlessly by the Church of Rome, which was implacably opposed to his teaching concerning Justification. When the Roman authorities attacked him through an Imperial Edict in 1531, Luther's response was blunt: "I see that the Devil is continually attacking this fundamental doctrine." Referring to himself as an unworthy herald of the Gospel, he declared himself determined to preach it all the more.

The Puritan Thomas Watson quotes Luther as saying that, after his death the doctrine of justification would be corrupted. Such a course must needs be resisted because, as Watson says, "Justification is the very hinge and pillar of Christianity ... Justification by Christ is a spring of the water of life."

B.B. Warfield writes about a dogma in which "is summed up all the

teaching of Scripture" and identifies it as "the sole efficiency of God in Salvation". He continues,

> This is what we call the material principle of the Reformation. It was not at first known by the name of Justification by Faith alone but it was from the first passionately embraced as renunciation of all human works and dependence upon the grace of God alone for Salvation. In it the Reformation lived and moved and had its being; in a high sense of the words, it is the Reformation.

James Buchanan also saw justification by faith as the material principle of the Reformation and says,

> Martin Luther described the doctrine of Justification by Faith as *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae* – the article of faith that decides whether the Church is standing or falling.

Let us listen to the Pastor, Preacher and Professor, as he makes his great confession of faith:

> I, Dr Martin Luther, the unworthy evangelist of the Lord Jesus Christ, thus think and thus affirm, that this article, namely, 'that faith alone, without works, justifies us before God,' can never be overthrown. For Christ alone, the Son of God, died for our sins; but if Christ alone takes away our sins, then men, with all their works are to be excluded from all concurrence in procuring the pardon of sin and justification. Nor can I embrace Christ otherwise than by faith alone. He cannot be apprehended by works. But if faith, before works follow, apprehend the Redeemer, it is undoubtedly true that faith alone, before works and without works, appropriates the benefits of Redemption, which is no other than Justification, or deliverance from sin. This is our doctrine; so The Holy Spirit teaches and the whole Christian church. In this, by the Grace of God, will we stand fast. Amen!

V THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

That was a glorious day when Martin Luther discovered a copy of the Bible in the library of the monastery at Erfurt. Thomas Carlyle has referred to that as Luther's "most blessed discovery." Among the many treasures he found therein was the doctrine of *the Priesthood of All Believers* and what he learned from the Word of God was contrary to all that he had been taught and had experienced in the Church of Rome. In that sacerdotal system the "laity" was dependent upon the priesthood which was composed of fallen human beings who believed they possessed quite extraordinary powers. They had been taught that they could change the bread and wine of the *mass* into the body and blood of Christ. They could forgive sin and grant absolution. These and other very

serious powers were the possessions of men in their vocations as priests.

Luther's early concept of priesthood, therefore, was that taught by the Church of Rome, but he was to experience a profound change in his thinking as a result of his "most blessed discovery." There he discovered that all believers are called upon to present their bodies as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1) and to offer to God the sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15). Believers have been constituted "a kingdom of priests" (1 Pet 1:9) or "a royal priesthood". They are living stones and have been "built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:5). All that, says Luther, is the vocation and the dignity of the humblest believer in Christ! This concept, however, must be construed in terms of all believers' endeavours in life: "A cobbler, a smith, a peasant, whatever he may be, a man has the labour and occupation of his craft and yet all men alike are consecrated bishops and priests". Luther drives the message home as he writes:

> A poor servant-girl may say, I cook the meals, I make up the beds, I dust the rooms. Who has bidden me do it? My Master and my Mistress have bidden me. Who has given them the right to command me? God has given it to them. So it is true that I am serving God in Heaven as well as them. How happy can I feel now! It is as if I were in heaven, doing my work for God.

The idea of the priesthood of all believers is then, much wider in scope than that of the preaching ministry. It reaches out to the children of God in their daily work and describes that as their *vocation*.

How Luther rejoiced in this doctrine! In his preaching, teaching and writing, he emphasized this glorious truth – every believer is a priest. He could write a lovely work entitled, *The Freedom of a Christian Man* which was exceedingly well received. Says one authority:

> The work restates the priesthood of all believers and the possessions of the Christian man through faith in such impressive terms that it made a most useful manual of private devotion and as such it enjoyed considerable popularity.

Now, whilst every believer enjoys the right and privilege of intercession, not every believer is called to preach. There is, says the Reformer, "one common estate" (*Stand*) but a variety of offices (*Amte*) and functions. Yet the community of intercessors, a priesthood of fellow-helpers, a family of mutual sharers and burden-bearers – that, says Luther, is the *Communio Sanctorum*.

In 1520, Martin Luther published a work entitled *A Treatise on the New Testament* in which the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers finds admirable expression. Believing with all his heart that the doctrine was true because it was biblical, he wrote, "If faith alone is the true priestly office, then

all Christians are priests." Again, he says, "The fact that we are all priests and kings means that each of us Christians may go before God and intercede for the other."

Of course, this teaching was revolutionary and produced the most wonderful results. In fact, Hillerbrand is of the opinion that as far as the economic and social dimensions of society were concerned, the Protestant Reformation was "indirectly revolutionary" and "directly conservative". Yet he concedes that Luther's teaching that every job and every profession was "a vocation" and enjoyed a spiritual blessing, "was of immense significance."

In practical terms, the number of people entering monasteries and convents diminished. The "man in the street" now thought rather differently from previously about what constitutes a vocation. On the other hand, the ranks of teachers, medical doctors, lawyers and farmers expanded. In pursuing such professions, believers now realized that they were serving God as much as the pastor or preacher. Together, they were priests unto God.

Listen now to Karl Heim as he describes the practical outcome of Luther's teaching:

> The workshop became a church, a man's native land a sanctuary; all who were engaged in maintaining human life became consecrated priests in this vast Church of God. This was Luther's new contribution; the conception of a man's calling in the work as service given to God.

Postscript

In this tentative proposal concerning *The Five Points of Lutheranism*, some emphasis has been placed upon the experiential theology of the great Reformer, Martin Luther. That, however, must be understood in the light of his absolute commitment to the Word of God. That Word, for him, was *foundational* and *impregnable*. It is on that basis, therefore, that we may hear Luther crying out that the Devil was his best professor and that temptation was the best school of theology. At the same time, even though he was an outstanding genius, it is encouraging to hear him say that the best teachers are always learners.

There was nothing coldly academic about Luther's theology and beliefs. Lloyd-Jones could write about

> this volcanic element, this living element, this experimental element, this experiential element, which lies at the heart and centre of the story of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation.

His, therefore, was a heart-felt faith.

Writing about Luther's solution to the antinomy of the Church's teaching, Lindsay says it "was familiar to simple piety although unknown to the academic theology of the Middle Ages...for the theology of the heart is always far in advance of that of the Schools." What was Luther's motto? – PECTUS EST QUOD THEOLOGUM FACIT (It is the heart that makes the theologian).

BOOK REVIEWS

Ancient Near Eastern Thought And The Old Testament: Introducing The Conceptual World Of The Hebrew Bible, John H. Walton, Apollos (I.V.P.), 2007, pbk., 368 pages £16.99.

This is a fascinating and informative work for the discerning reader keen to understand more of the background to the Old Testament. Obviously the Old Testament documents were written in a historical and cultural context (what Walton calls a "cognitive environment") that spans a lengthy era. Now that archaeology and related disciplines are revealing more and more of that context and specialists are making more and more of it available to us, key questions arise. Are we now in a position to establish the key lines of Ancient Near Eastern thought, and, if so, how does Old Testament "theology" sit against this context? How can such a knowledge be utilized in understanding and interpreting the Old Testament (e.g. traditional apparent problems of interpretation)? It is obvious from the history of polemics that such comparative studies need to be handled with care (think, for example, of the conservative Franz Delitzsch's son Friedrich who went completely off the rails in his notorious "Babel und Bibel" lectures in 1902, or the ongoing debate on the archaeological evidence from Jericho).

By and large Walton, the Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, U.S.A., proves to be a sure-footed and safe guide through the vast amount of diverse material, coming up again and again with fascinating insights that illuminate the Old Testament text. After sketching the chequered history of Old Testament "comparative studies", he establishes the sound principles that will guide him in his own study, arguing that such study can assist in analysis, defence and exegesis of the text. There then follows for the uninitiated an excellent summary of the relevant extant literature of the Ancient Near East, helpfully arranged under various headings.

The remainder of the book is a careful attempt to analyse this material under the headings of:- the gods, temples and their rituals, state and family religion, the understanding of the cosmos and related cosmology, human origins and role, the understanding of the past, how guidance comes for the present, communal life under kingship, guidance, the future, etc. The highlights of each chapter are the sidebars in which Walton draws out how the Ancient Near Eastern material may throw light on parallel Old Testament concerns, individual passages and words. A helpful postscript then sketches the main conclusions.

The book is scholarly, stimulating and written in an engaging style and is to be highly recommended for the way it introduces us to and guides us through

the whole world of comparative Old Testament studies. It brings to our fingertips a vast body of complex material and the vaster body of critical scholarship that accompanies it.

In welcoming the book, this is not to say that this reviewer agrees in detail with every interpretative suggestion or conclusion. We would take issue with aspects of Walton's ideas on "cosmic geography" developed in chapter 7, but mentioned earlier in his discussion of the Garden of Eden (pp.120-121), on the Hebrew word "bara" (p.183) and the novel suggestion that the "long day" incident of Joshua 10 be interpreted as Joshua merely asking for and receiving a propitious celestial omen ("Joshua 10 operates in the world of omens not physics." pp.262-263).

Finally, while comparative studies may throw added light on the sacred text, they are not a panacea. Above all they must not undermine the principle that the church understood before their rise, and that is that the most important interpreter of inspired Scripture is inspired Scripture itself.

Norris Wilson

Preaching for Revitalization, Michael F Ross, Mentor, 2006, pbk, 240 pages, £10.99.

The word "revitalization", although around for a long time, has only been applied to the church comparatively recently. The concept is usually considered in association with the word "revival". Whatever word we use is inconsequential. The important thing to realize is that the church in many places needs revival, it needs revitalization. The church requires God the Holy Spirit to breathe new life into the body, the church, before it becomes a corpse.

Recognizing that preachers are instruments in the Redeemer's hands, Mike Ross in this volume defines their role. He uses to good effect his many years of experience in the pastoral ministry and the revitalization he has witnessed in Trinity Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi, where he is the senior pastor.

The basic premise of the author is that true church revitalization can never take place and be maintained unless it is the product of a "biblical pulpit". Recognizing the weakness of preaching generally and the lack of emphasis on preaching in current revitalization publications, the author's aim is to correct this imbalance. He sets forth carefully constructed arguments, demonstrating with clarity the biblical foundations on which this structure is based. His familiarity with Reformation and Puritan preaching enables him to demonstrate convincingly how God used preaching to build and revitalize congregations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

After an introductory chapter the book is divided into four parts. The focus is primarily on Puritan preaching: Priority and Promotion in Puritan Preaching, The Content of Puritan Preaching, The Characteristics of Puritan Preaching and The Expository Style of Puritan Preaching.

Part one is like a refresher course for preachers. Attention is drawn to the essence of preaching using the family of words in the Greek New Testament to define the subject. He establishes from the Word of God the primacy of preaching, pointing out the priority that was given to preaching in our Lord's ministry and the life of the Reformers, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin. A practical section encourages preachers to give careful thought to what he calls "the planning of the pulpit". He demonstrates that this is of crucial importance in situations of spiritual decline so that the problems and issues contributing to spiritual malaise can be biblically addressed in an appropriate and well balanced series of sermons.

The content of Puritan preaching is the topic for the second part and is carefully considered in six chapters. After an extensive survey of Puritan sermons, the author identifies five key themes: Christological preaching, Ecclesiastical preaching, Missiological preaching, Doctrinal preaching and Ethical preaching. In his treatment of each theme he shows how each can be twinned with one of the letters of the seven churches in Asia Minor (Revelation 2,3). For example, sick and dying churches, he indicates, have invariably "left their first love" like the church in Ephesus. He leaves the reader in no doubt that "the pulpit that revitalizes a church must refocus people on the wonder and glory of the person of Jesus Christ." When considering ecclesiastical preaching he not only opens up the biblical doctrine of the church, but also indicates the vital place that biblical fellowship should have in the restoration of a congregation to spiritual health.

Part three, the characteristics of Puritan preaching, is the most valuable section in the opinion of this reviewer. In the chapter entitled "Romantic Preaching" Ross illustrates from the Reformers and the Puritans how preaching comes alive when something of the spiritual heartbeat of the preacher is evident in the proclamation of God's Word. He bemoans the fact that seldom is this found and points out that "Jeremiah's fire in the bones" has been quenched by both discouragement and self-doubt. Taking Luther and Calvin as examples, he quotes John A. Broadus who says of them, "along with intellect they had force of character; an energetic nature and will". The author himself informs us that he has purposefully endeavoured not to hold back but to "let the fire and freedom of his love affair with Christ spill over into the pulpit". This is a truly excellent chapter and one which preachers would do well to consider thoughtfully and practice resolutely.

The concluding section, the expository style of Puritan preaching, helpfully summarizes the nature, history and practice of expository preaching.

This method, he believes, more than any other, with the blessing of Christ, will promote the health and well-being of a congregation.

There are many books in print on preaching but *Preaching for Revitalization* makes several emphases which are often overlooked. Therefore, whether you are a student for the ministry, in early years of ministry or approaching retirement, this book is an essential read and should revitalize your preaching and your congregation. Highly recommended.

Robert McCollum

The King's Reformation. Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church, G W. Bernard, Yale University Press, 2005, hbk., 736 pages, £29.95.

The English Reformation has in recent years become a highly controversial period of history. Older interpretations, which tended to see the Protestant reforming movement sweeping aside fairly comprehensively a largely moribund Catholicism, have been challenged by scholars who argue that sixteenth century Catholicism was a living force in England and that the success of Protestantism was not nearly as great as once thought. The role played in the origin and growth of the Reformation by the king, Henry VIII, has also been the subject of considerable debate, with some influential scholars regarding him as merely the unsteady centre of powerful competing factions in the court and the church.

The heart of this weighty (in every sense) study by G. W. Bernard, Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Southampton, is a reassessment of the place of Henry VIII in the development of the English Reformation of the 1520s and 1530s. For Bernard, Henry was not the victim of manipulative factions, but was rather his own man from the outset, pursuing a definite course of his own devising and, in many respects, getting his own ruthless way. Bernard provides, not an exhaustive chronological study, but a detailed examination of several key aspects of the Reformation in England.

The chapters consider in turn the royal divorce ("the King's Matter"), opposition at home and abroad to Henry's machinations, the defence of the royal supremacy in spiritual affairs and the beginning of the suppression of the monasteries, rebellion and conspiracy (including the Pilgrimage of Grace), the final suppression of all the monasteries, and the development of Henry's religious policy in the late 1530s (including the fall of Thomas Cromwell).

Central to Bernard's account of the English Reformation is the role of Henry VIII. He has often been viewed as a man with few clear religious convictions, carried to and fro by the competing factions in both Church and State. On such accounts the key figures are men such as Thomas Wolsey,

Thomas Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell. In Bernard's view, however, whilst these men did play significant roles, it is Henry who shaped events according to his own specific agenda. The Church of England as it existed by the end of the 1530s was substantially that which the king desired, often to the dissatisfaction of those whom other historians regard as the decisive influences.

In offering this view of the English Reformation, Bernard provides a number of distinctive interpretations of crucial events during the 1520s and 1530s. He argues, for example, that from an early stage Henry was prepared, in the pursuit of his divorce, to contemplate a break with Rome if this should prove necessary. Bernard's Henry is a determined figure, ruthless with opponents, clear in the goals he is pursuing. Ultimately all significant opposition is crushed and the break with Rome becomes a reality, with the supremacy of the king enforced throughout the country. When required, force was readily used, as in the suppression of the Pilgrimage of Grace.

Bernard also argues for a number of distinctive interpretations of other events during these years. The suppression of the monasteries was not undertaken solely for financial reasons. Henry, Bernard argues, believed that the Church was in need of a measure of reform, especially from the idolatry and superstition associated with the numerous monastic shrines and places of pilgrimage which were so popular at the time. Bernard also argues at length that the motivation for the Pilgrimage of Grace was not primarily economic, as many historians assert, but religious. On this view, the pilgrims sought to defend the "old religion" which the king, in their opinion, was progressively dismantling.

What Henry sought, says Bernard, was a middle way between the conservatism of Roman Catholicism and the radicalism of Lutheranism. He was concerned for reform, but only within carefully controlled parameters, and by the end of the 1530s his policy was triumphant.

Bernard argues his case with copious references to the original documents and in dialogue with other leading historians, and yet in a style which is remarkably readable in a work of this level of scholarship. For some the degree of detail may seem too great, yet others will find that the main figures come to life as their own words are quoted at length. Historians will of course debate Bernard's conclusions and write further tomes on the English Reformation. There is considerable scope for debate, not only on the matters noted above, but on others such as the role of Anne Boleyn in promoting reformed thinking. (She was peripheral at best, in Bernard's estimation). Nevertheless, by any standard, this is a major contribution to the historiography of the English Reformation and one that any future assessment of the period will have to take into account.

Evangelical Theological Perspectives on post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism, Leonardo De Chirico, Peter Lang, 2003, pbk., 337 pages, £39.00.

Modern Evengelical appraisals of Roman Catholicism have often been of a fairly simplistic kind, taking Rome's own "semper eadem" tag as the last word on the subject. That more needs to be said should be evident from the debate within Roman Catholicism regarding the changes sought by the Second Vatican Council (1962-5). Post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism is a different entity from what went before: different, that is, in some respects and the same in others. Evangelical writers have shown varying degrees of sensitivity to this phenomenon.

In this slightly revised version of his 2003 Ph.D. thesis for King's College, London, Italian Baptist theologian Leonardo De Chirico seeks to evaluate some of the most prominent Evangelical assessments of post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism and also to formulate his own method of assessment which avoids some of the weaknesses of others. The first element is interesting and helpful, but it is the second which is of far greater theological significance.

The first chapter considers how "Evangelical theology" and "Evangelicalism" are to be defined, and then comments on the state of Evangelical theology, noting its great diversity. It is in chapter two that six theologians, offered by De Chirico as representative of the wide spread of Evangelical perspectives, are chosen and their views of contemporary Roman Catholicism are surveyed. Gerrit Berkouwer wrote on the subject mainly around the time of Vatican II and so his books do not take into account the outworking of the aspirations of the council. He recognised that changes were taking place and called for a "realistic ecumenism" and counselled a "wait and see" approach. Cornelius van Til viewed Romanism from the point of view of the antithesis between truth and error, noting that the newer Roman Catholicism simply substituted service of Kant for that of Aristotle. David Wells highlighted the conflicting theological strands within the Roman Catholicism evident in the Vatican II debates and believed that these tensions would eventually have to be resolved with the triumph of one "party". Donald Bloesch accepted Roman Catholicism as one historic type of Christianity and did not really explore its theological structures. Herbert Carson, taking a rather less academic approach, accepted the "semper eadem" tag and discerned the dominating power of the Council of Trent even in Vatican II. John Stott did not write much on the subject of Roman Catholicism, but is significant on account of his involvement in the Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission (ERCDOM).

More wide-ranging examples of Evangelical interaction with Roman Catholicism are examined in the following two chapters, which look in turn at the World Evangelical Fellowship and at Evangelical-Roman Catholic

Common Statements. As far as the WEF is concerned, De Chirico considers both the internal controversy in the WEF over Roman Catholicism in the late 1970s and also the study report produced in 1986. Two significant common statements are also studied: *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* and *The Gift of Salvation*, both of which generated considerable controversy within the Evangelical constituency.

The discussion moves to a more complex level in chapters five and six, as De Chirico develops his own methodology for the analysis of Roman Catholicism. Drawing on the work of Abraham Kuyper, especially in his *Lectures on Calvinism*, De Chirico argues that an adequate Evangelical response to Roman Catholicism must be *systemic* in nature. Evangelical theologians have generally been piecemeal in their responses, even if particular elements of their critiques are accurate. They fail to address Roman Catholicism as a coherent *system* and so often miss the mark in evaluating it. For example, few appear to understand that the Roman Catholic system has always been able to hold together apparently contradictory perspectives, so that the tensions evident in the post-Vatican II version noted by David Wells, for example, will not in fact have to be resolved in favour of one view or the other.

Having shown that Roman Catholic theologians themselves perceive Roman Catholicism in systemic terms, De Chirico in his final chapter offers a thoroughly stimulating systemic analysis of post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism in terms first of its understanding of nature and grace and second of its ecclesiology, which he demonstrates to be a necessary expression of the nature/grace nexus. A wide range of fundamental theological issues are brought coherently into the discussion by this systemic approach.

De Chirico has provided in this study much more than an evaluation of the work of other Evangelical theologians. This is itself a searching analysis of Roman Catholicism by a theologian who is fully conversant with both the literature and the ethos of contemporary Roman Catholicism. He has succeeded in making clear that the systemic approach of Kuyper is the key to grasping Roman Catholicism as a whole, and he has also done vital fundamental work in applying that approach in practice. This is an essential resource for an Evangelical understanding of contemporary Roman Catholicism. It is all the more remarkable for being the work of a theologian writing in his second language.

David McKay

BOOK NOTICES

On Being Presbyterian. Our Beliefs, Practices, and Stories, Sean Michael Lucas, P & R Publishing (Distributed in the UK by Evangelical Press), 2006, pbk., 272 pages, $14.99.

Many who belong to Presbyterian churches have little idea what Presbyterianism means, and often assume that it is largely a matter of tradition. This book by Sean Michael Lucas, who teaches at Covenant Seminary, St. Louis, should do much to rectify such weaknesses. It is aimed at popular audience, and is accessible to a wide readership. Part 1 is entitled "Presbyterian Beliefs" and covers the sovereignty of God, the priority of grace, covenant and kingdom, the church and the sacraments. Part 2 deals with "Presbyterian Practices", namely piety, worship and government. It perhaps comes as no surprise these days that the Regulative Principle of Worship is not seen to lead to unaccompanied exclusive psalmody in worship. Part 3 provides some insights into "Presbyterian Stories", including Calvin and Knox, but majoring on North American Presbyterian history from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. When allowance is made for the American origins of the book, it will be a useful resource for training church members in their Presbyterian heritage.

Pierced For Our Transgressions. Rediscovering the glory of penal substitution, Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey and Andrew Sach, IVP, 2007, pbk., 373 pages, £16.99.

The doctrine of penal substitution has in recent times come under sustained attack, both academic and popular. The idea that Christ has taken the punishment due to the sins of others is dismissed on a variety of grounds. This volume by three writers associated in various ways with Oak Hill Theological College, London, provides both a response to criticisms of the doctrine and, more importantly, a substantial positive statement of this biblical description of the death of Christ. After an introductory survey of the controversy that has arisen, along with an overview of recent contributions on both sides of the debate, the authors provide in turn a wide-ranging exegetical study of both Old and New Testament passages relating to penal substitution, a theological framework for the doctrine and an exploration of the pastoral importance of penal substitution (an area often overlooked). They then set out the "historical pedigree" of the doctrine, finding its antecedents at a much earlier point in history than do most of its critics. The second part of the book is entitled

"Answering the Critics" and in it the authors aim to refute all the main contemporary criticisms levelled at penal substitution. Criticisms arising from different understandings of the Bible and from cultural factors are considered. Issues such as violence, justice, our understanding of God and of the Christian life are all addressed in a thorough manner. The book ends with "A personal note to preachers" regarding the preaching of penal substitution. This is a most useful volume and will undoubtedly make a significant contribution for good to the current debate over an essential aspect of the gospel.

Justified in Christ. God's plan for us in justification, edited by K. Scott Oliphint, Mentor, 2007, pbk., 309 pages, £11.99.

By Faith Alone. Answering the Challenges to the Doctrine of Justification, edited by Gary L. W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters, Crossway Books, 2006, pbk., 219 pages, $17.99.

The Gospel of Free Acceptance in Christ. An Assessment of the Reformation and New Perspective on Paul, Cornelis P. Venema, Banner of Truth Trust, 2006, hbk., 337 pages, £16.00.

Justification in Perspective. Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges, edited by Bruce L. McCormack, Baker Academic and Rutherford House, 2006, pbk., 277 pages, £14.99

The doctrine of justification has for some years been a storm-centre of theological debate, with vital issues of gospel truth at stake. In different ways these titles make a contribution to the ongoing controversy.

The first, *Justified in Christ*, is divided into two parts. The first consists of nine contributions by members of the Faculty (past and present) of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, covering areas of biblical, historical, apologetic and pastoral concern, together with an extensive bibliographical essay on the subject of justification. Contributors include Richard Gaffin, Peter Lillback, Carl Trueman and William Edgar, and the pastoral paper is by Ulsterman Stafford Carson. Topics covered include justification and union with Christ, John Owen on justification, the active obedience of Christ and the Westminster Standards, and covenant faith. The second part of the book is a reprint of John Murray's profound monograph *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, which was originally published in 1959. Imputation is of course crucial to a right understanding of justification. Although at first sight, the combination of these diverse parts may seem strange, they provide useful perspectives on the doctrine of justification.

A range of issues is examined in the essays in *By Faith Alone*. Challenges to the traditional doctrine of justification from both the New Perspective on Paul and from the more recent Federal Vision are taken into account in studies by a number of leading North American Reformed theologians. Cornelis Venema and David Gordon examine the views of Tom Wright. Richard Phillips and FitzSimons Allison consider the nature of imputation in relation to justification. David Gordon also addresses the attractions and fatal flaws of the Auburn Avenue perspective. Other papers consider the place of Christ's active obedience in justification and the nature of covenants, especially the Covenant of Works, finishing with an unusual study entitled "The Reformation, Today's Evangelicals, and Mormons: *What Next?*" This volume usefully combines with the Oliphint collection to give wide coverage of all the main challenges to justification as traditionally understood.

Cornelis Venema's book-length study deals in considerable detail with the nature of the New Perspective on Paul and the implications of it for the gospel message. He begins by outlining the Reformation perspective on Paul's doctrine of justification, including the view of good works in relation to justification which characterised the Reformers and which is so crucial in contemporary debates. Venema then devotes two chapters to a careful exposition of the work of E. P. Sanders, James Dunn and Tom Wright who together have developed what has become known as the New Perspective. The rest of the book is taken up by critical interaction with these scholars on key issues such as the meaning of Paul's expressions "works of the law" and "the righteousness of God". Imputation of Christ's righteousness and justification and final judgment according to works are also considered. This is a clearly written and valuable contribution to current debates and should encourage readers in a firm adherence to the biblical doctrine of justification enshrined in the Reformed confessions.

Justification in Perspective contains the papers presented at the Tenth Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference held in 2003 under the sponsorship of Rutherford House. After the conference sermon by Mark Bonnington on "The Protestant Doctrine of Justification: The Heart of Protestant Preaching", six historical papers follow. These include "Justification in the Early Church Fathers" by Nick Needham, "Justification in Augustine" by David Wright and "*Simul peccator et justus*: Martin Luther and Justification" by Carl Trueman. An interesting paper by Andrew McGowan on the relationship between justification and the traditional "*ordo salutis*" approach to salvation is also included in this section. The remaining four papers consider continuities and discontinuities in current challenges to the traditional understanding of justification. Bruce McCormack considers Barth's view of justification in

conversation with the evangelical doctrine of imputed righteousness. Henri Blocher examines the Lutheran-Catholic Declaration on Justification. Simon Gathercole offers some proposals regarding the doctrine of justification in Paul and beyond. Tom Wright has opportunity to speak for himself in "New Perspectives on Paul". There is considerable diversity in this collection, not least with the inclusion of one of the architects of the New Perspective, and it offers a stimulating supplement to the other volumes reviewed here.

Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics, Stephen J. Grabill, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006, pbk., 310 pages, $38.00 [£21.99].

It is often assumed that "natural law" and "natural theology" are categories confined to Roman Catholic theology, alien to Reformed thinking. In different ways, the views of Karl Barth and Cornelius Van Til have in modern times strengthened this perception. It may come as a surprise, therefore, to find frequent references in older Reformed writers to "natural law" and "the law of nature". This thorough and provocative study by Stephen Grabill seeks to demonstrate how significant a role natural law and man's natural knowledge of God played in theologians from Calvin to Turretin. After considering Barth's strictures on natural law and surveying the development of the natural law tradition through to the Middle Ages, Grabill devotes chapters to John Calvin, Peter Marytr Vermigli, Johannes Althusius and Francis Turretin. He shows, for example, how Calvin allowed for a proper functioning of fallen man's faculties in realms such as politics and economics, and he argues that Calvin's idea of the *duplex cognition Dei* opened up the field of natural law for his successors. In general, the natural law was regarded as God's moral law written on the hearts of all men and republished in the Decalogue. Later writers developed a more wide-ranging theory of natural law and sought to apply it to, for example, the spheres of government and politics. Grabill's study is most thought-provoking and raises a host of important questions about the capacities of fallen man and the effects of sin on his perception of truth.

Meet the Puritans, With a Guide to Modern Reprints, Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, Reformation Heritage Books, 2006, hbk., 896 pages, $35.00.

A book that has ten pages of recommendations from a wide range of Reformed scholars ought to be worthwhile reading. *Meet the Puritans* is such

a book. Beeke and Pederson have assembled a vast amount of material dealing with just about every significant Puritan writer, English, American, Scottish and Continental. A concise biographical sketch is provided for each writer and this is followed by a listing of any modern reprints of his work. The latter is not merely bibliographical – each volume is summarized and assessed. The editors also give a brief history of Puritanism, suggestions for mining the riches of Puritan writing and extensive references to useful secondary literature. This will be a most valuable resource for anyone interested in reading and understanding the Puritans, whether as a beginner or as a seasoned lover of this most fertile period of church history.

The New England Theology. From Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park, Douglas A. Sweeney and Allen C. Guelzo, Baker Academic, 2006, pbk., 320 pages, $29.99.

Much scholarly attention has been devoted to the theology of Jonathan Edwards in recent years, yet his theological descendents have been largely forgotten. This volume of extracts should help to make "the New England Theology" known to new generations of readers. Here we are able to listen to theologians discuss and reshape the legacy of Edwards in changing times. Some stayed close to Edwards' outlook, whilst others modified his views in radical ways. After an introduction in which the editors set the scene for the New England Theology and note several reasons why it still merits attention, a selection of extracts from authors such as Edwards himself, Joseph Bellamy, Samuel Hopkins, Jonathan Edwards the Younger, Nathaniel Taylor, Charles Finney and Edwards Amasa Park is then provided. These are divided into subject areas including The Emergence of a Movement: Early New Divinity Thought, The Moral Government of God: Edwardseans and the Atonement, Edwardsean Ethics: Antislavery and Missions, Theology in New Haven, and Last of the "Consistent Calvinists": Edwards Amasa Park. Each extract is accompanied by a brief introduction and a substantial bibliography is also provided. This is a significant book on an area of historical theology which will be new to many readers and is therefore most welcome.

James Ussher (1581-1656), edited by Dr. Don Kistler, Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2006, hbk., 297 pages, $26.00.

Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729), compiled and edited by Dr. Don Kistler, Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005, hbk., 315 pages, $22.00.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), compiled by Dr. Don Kistler, Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2004, hbk., 285 pages, $29.00.

Ebenezer Pemberton (1704-1777), compiled and edited by Dr. Don Kistler, Soli Deo Gloria Publications, hbk., 312 pages, $28.00.

These are the first four volumes of a projected series which will run to over fifty volumes and will take some fifteen years to complete. The aim is to provide representative selections of the sermons of the leading Puritan preachers from America and the British Isles. These volumes serve to whet the appetite for more.

James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, was a pivotal figure in the development of confessional Calvinism in the British Isles and exercised a great influence on the framers of the Westminster Confession of Faith through his Irish Articles. Until quite recently none of his works was available in a modern edition, so it is a particular delight to have these nineteen sermons, preached in 1640 and reproduced from notes taken by listeners. They cover the great central doctrines of the faith, including the nature and punishment of sin, the place of God's law, the atoning work of Christ, faith and peace with God.

Solomon Stoddard, maternal grandfather of Jonathan Edwards, was Edwards' predecessor in the pulpit at Northampton and a formative influence on the younger man's preaching. These seventeen sermons comprise almost all of Stoddard's remaining unpublished material and cover many pastoral and evangelistic subjects, including seven on "The Benefit of the Gospel to Those Who Are Wounded in Spirit".

Jonathan Edwards scarcely requires any introduction. His sermons are full of biblical truth and searching application. Although the number of his sermons in print is growing, fourteen of the sixteen in this volume have not previously been published. They cover subjects such as "God Never Changes His Mind", "God Is Kind to the Unthankful and the Evil", "Christ Is the Christian's All" and "Spiritual Appetites Need No Bounds".

Although largely forgotten today, Ebenezer Pemberton was a faithful minister for fifty-one years in New York and later in Boston. He was a contemporary of Jonathan Edwards and a friend of George Whitefield. This collection of twenty sermons contains much valuable exposition, including a sermon preached at the ordination of David Brainerd, the famous missionary to the Indians, and one occasioned by the death of Whitefield.

Historical Dictionary of the Puritans, Charles Pastoor and Galen K. Johnson, The Scarecrow Press, 2007, hbk., 403 pages, £56.00.

Pastoor and Johnson teach theology and English respectively at John Brown University and both are experts in the Puritan period. After an introduction and chronology, they provide a wide range of concise entries dealing with people, events, documents and ideas relevant to an understanding of the theology and history of the period. Thus articles include Ames, Arminianism, Conscience, Elizabeth I, Grand Remonstrance, Great Bible, Lecturer, Preaching, Sanctification, Solemn League and Covenant, Ussher, Women, and Worship, to take a random sample. The treatment is factual and avoids the caricatures and stereotypes so common in descriptions of the Puritans. Extensive bibliographies are also provided. There can always be quibbles about what is included in or omitted from such a reference work, but the coverage in this case is wide and most of the main events and personalities are included. It is a volume which will prove to be of great help in understanding the writings of the Puritans and the momentous times in which they lived.

Our Sovereign Refuge. The Pastoral Theology of Theodore Beza, Shawn D. Wright, Paternoster, 2004, pbk., 307 pages, £19.99.

Theodore Beza is often portrayed as a rigid, harsh scholastic theologian who, among other things, turned the warm theology of John Calvin into the cold system now known as "Calvinism". Several scholars in recent years have sought to provide a more balanced picture of Beza's theology, and this study will do much to strengthen that trend. Wright demonstrates that far from abstractly making the doctrine of predestination the strait-jacket into which all other elements of theology had to fit, Beza developed his view of divine sovereignty in the context of ministering to flesh and blood people in the midst of the struggles and tragedies of life in late sixteenth century Geneva. He begins with a vital examination of Beza's historical context, then considers the views of Beza's interpreters, noting how so many have ignored the central, defining component of Beza's identity, namely that he was a loving pastor and teacher. Wright then provides an overview of Beza's pastoral theology, drawing on one of his sermons and several of his theological treatises. Translations of the sermon and one of the treatises are helpfully included in an appendix. The remaining two chapters show how, in Beza's view, belief in God's sovereignty provides both comfort and assurance for God's people in their spiritual battle. This is a most valuable study of a Reformed theologian who is little known and frequently caricatured, and is also a helpful guide to the pastoral implications of belief in the absolute sovereignty of God.

Enforcing Reformation in Ireland and Scotland, 1550-1700, edited by Elizabethanne Boran and Crawford Gribben, Ashgate, 2006, hbk., 259 pages, £55.00.

It has for some time been recognised that studies of the Reformation which treat England, Scotland and Ireland as entirely separate entities are fundamentally misguided. The three kingdoms are interconnected in numerous ways, and patterns and trends during the Reformation were to some degree shared, even when allowance is made for the distinctive features of each region. The papers collected in this volume, originally prepared for a conference in Trinity College, Dublin, in 2001, consider a variety of aspects of the Reformation in Ireland and Scotland, noting similarities and contrasts where appropriate. Readers of this journal may be rather more familiar with the Scottish Reformation, represented here by papers such as "The Problem of 'Scottish Puritanism', 1590-1638" (John Coffey), "The Covenanters and the Scottish Parliament, 1639-51: The Rule of the Godly and the 'Second Scottish Reformation'" (John R. Young) and "Robert Leighton, Edinburgh Theology and the Collapse of the Presbyterian Consensus" (Crawford Gribben). The less familiar Irish Reformation is represented by papers which include "'Force and Fear of Punishment': Protestants and Religious Coercion in Ireland, 1603-33" (Alan Ford), "Godly Order: Enforcing Peace in the Irish Reformation" (Raymond Gillespie) and "Enforcing the Reformation in Ireland, 1660-1704" (Toby Barnard). The final paper, "Conformity and Security in Scotland and Ireland, 1660-85", is by the late Richard L. Greaves, who died in 2004 and to whom the volume is dedicated.

John Wyclif. Myth and Reality, G. R. Evans, IVP Academic, 2005, hbk., 320 pages, $25.00.

In the course of time many myths have grown up around the figure of John Wyclif, sometimes designated the "Morning Star of the Reformation". His challenges to the authority of the Papacy and his role in the rise of the Lollards have made him a hero in Protestant eyes, and biographies of Wyclif tend towards the hagiographical. This thorough study of Wyclif by G. R. Evans, Professor of Medieval Theology and Intellectual History at the University of Cambridge, should serve to clear away many of the myths and restore an accurate picture of Wyclif. Above all Evans sets Wyclif in his proper context of fourteenth century Oxford, with its academic debates and political rivalries. Wyclif emerges as a very able yet also fallible figure, who became entangled in political controversies not of his own making. He may not be the hero of Protestant hagiography, but he is nevertheless a significant figure in the

development of reforming ideas. As Evans concludes, "History gains rather than loses when it becomes possible to treat a hero as a complex and fallible human being, with all the dimensions which enrich as much as they challenge the earlier, simpler pictures of the man who was hero and villain."

David McKay