

Sovereign Grace Union: Doctrinal Basis

The Holy Scriptures

The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as originally given, as the inspired and infallible and inerrant Word of God, and as the sole, supreme, and all-sufficient authority in every matter of Christian faith and practice.

The Trinity

One living and true God, Sovereign in creation, providence and redemption, subsisting in three Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – the same in substance, and equal in power and glory.

The Lord Jesus Christ

The Eternal Sonship and the essential, absolute, and eternal Deity, and true and sinless humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ; His virgin birth, death, and burial; His physical resurrection and ascension into heaven, and His coming again in power and glory.

The Holy Spirit

The Personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit, through Whom the sinner is born again to saving repentance and faith, and by Whom the saints are sanctified through the truth.

The Fall of Man

The fall of mankind in Adam, by which they have totally lost their original righteousness and holiness, and have come under the righteous condemnation of God.

Unconditional Election

The personal and unconditional election in Christ of a multitude which no man can number unto everlasting salvation, out of God's pure grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works in them.

Particular Redemption

The personal and eternal redemption from all sin and the penal consequence thereof, of all God's elect, by the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Effectual Calling

The effectual calling of all the elect by the irresistible grace of God.

Justification

The justification of sinners by faith alone, through the atoning death and resurrection and imputed righteousness of Christ.

Final Perseverance

The final perseverance in the state of grace of all those who have been elected by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, so that they shall never perish but have eternal life.

In reference to the above, consult the XXXIX Articles of the Church of England, the Westminster Confession, the Savoy Declaration and the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith.

Editorial

When the ark of the covenant was looted from Israel by the Philistines, the widow of Phinehas gave birth to a son. She named him Ichabod, saying: “The glory is departed from Israel.” (1 Samuel 4.21) We may well ask today: “Has the glory departed from the Church?”

For one thing, modern Dispensationalism openly belittles the Church. Under the false notion that when the Jewish nation rejected Jesus as its king, the Lord decided to postpone the kingdom of God and to build a Church, Dispensationalists regard the Church as merely a parenthesis, an interlude, not nearly as important as the kingdom. Consequently, they remain ignorant of the Biblical doctrine of the Church. In this way, the glory of the Church is obscured by false teaching.

In the second place, widespread propaganda insists that the Church is a vast, visible institution, recognized by its massive cathedrals, ornate ‘church’ interiors, showy clerical dress, air of antiquity and solemn processions. Poor Savonarola, the Florentine martyr, well described its gaudiness when he said: “In the primitive Church the chalices were of wood and the prelates of gold; in these days the Church has chalices of gold and prelates of wood.” Here the glory of the Church is obscured by sensual materialism.

Thirdly, the Church’s glory is severely tarnished by its sheer worldliness. Creating a ‘feel good factor’ for newcomers; entertaining worshippers and their children with ‘Christian clowns,’ silly jokes, ‘celebrity’ testimonies and cheap popular music; claiming immediate revelations and instant healings; and raising money through raffles, Victorian markets, jazz festivals and blatant begging have all contributed to the devaluing of the Church, its worship and its glorious God.

By all these things the Spirit of God is grieved and has withdrawn many of His gracious influences. Where are the sound conversions, practical impartial Christian love, consecrated services and reverent worship of yesteryear? The churches appear to have forgotten John Owen’s reminder that the Holy Spirit is given to make the people of God holy and spiritual.

Has then the glory departed? Not entirely. Here and there the Lord continues to build His Church, as He promised. There is a remnant according to the election of grace. His elect are always before His face and under His care. He delights in their love for His truth, their refusal to compromise and their obedience to His will. Whatever others think of them, He speaks well of them. (Psalm 87.2-3) One day He will cause their glory to shine brighter than the sun. Let us take this to heart, and heed Bonar’s bidding:

‘Go, labour on, spend and be spent,
Thy joy to do the Father’s will;
It is the way the Master went;
Should not the servant tread it still?’

.....
The Christian Church is glorious in its very nature.

R. B. Kuiper

The excellence of the Church does not consist in multitude but in purity.

John Calvin

The Church has many critics but no rivals.

Anonymous

The Church is the communion of saints . . . not essentially a visible society.

Charles Hodge

I am sorry for our desolate kirk; yet I dare not but trust, so long as there be any of God’s money here, He shall not blow out the candle.

Samuel Rutherford

The Church of Jesus Christ will one day stand at the grave of the B.B.C.

Lord Reith

A Calvinistic Catechism *(Conclusion)*

What Is The Doctrine Of Reprobation To Damnation?

Reprobation . . . is . . . the act of God's will by which, when he viewed all mankind as involved in guilt and misery, he rejected some. (Robert Shaw)

[Some are chosen to life] . . . Others are refused and left in a perishing condition. (Christopher Ness)

It pleased God [of his sovereign mercy to rescue some and] to leave others where they were. (J. B. Mozley)

There can be no election without its opposite, reprobation. (John Calvin)

One View:

The apostle hinges the whole matter entirely on *God's absolute sovereignty*. There he rests it, and there we ought to leave it. (Augustus M. Toplady)

If the reason be inquired why God passed by some of mankind sinners, while he elected others to life, it must be resolved into *the counsel of his own will*, whereby he extends or withholds mercy as he pleases. (Robert Shaw)

Another View:

The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will . . . to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath *for their sin*, to the praise of his glorious justice. (Westminster Confession)

It is a clearly revealed Scriptural principle that where there is no sin there is no condemnation . . . Everywhere, as in Romans 1:24, 26, 28, *reprobation is declared to be judicial*, founded upon the sinfulness of its object. Otherwise it could not be a manifestation of the justice of God. (Charles Hodge)

Scripture Proof:

[He hath mercy upon whom he will have mercy,] and whom he will he hardeneth. (Romans 9:18)

[The election hath obtained it,] and the rest were blinded. (Romans 11:7)

[Unto you therefore which believe, he is precious:] but unto them which be disobedient . . . a stone of stumbling . . . whereunto also they were appointed. (1 Peter 7-8)

Whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world. (Revelation 17:8)

God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. (Romans 9:22)

Thou wilt say then unto me: Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? (Romans 9:19-21)

What Else Do We Know About This Doctrine?

There are many passages of Scripture in which this doctrine is taught. (John Dick)

The picture often painted by opponents of Calvinism, of a cruel God refusing to save those who long to be saved, is a gross caricature. God saves all who want to be saved, but no one whose nature is unchanged wants to be saved. (F. E. Hamilton)

We are warranted by the whole tenor of Scripture in maintaining that . . . God in his sovereignty withholds from men . . . the opportunity and power of believing and being saved. (William Cunningham)

The heathen as a class are lost. (Loraine Boettner)

Those who have not Christ and the Gospel are lost. (Loraine Boettner)

Scripture Proof:

I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. (Matthew 11:25-26)

Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:13)

Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. (Revelation 22:17)

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. (Acts 16:31)

At that time ye were without Christ . . . having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:12-13)

As many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law;
and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.
(Romans 2:12)

The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost.
(Matthew 18:11)

What Names Are Given To Those God Has Ordained To Eternal Death?

Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath
rejected them. (Jeremiah 6:30)

Ungodly men. (Jude 4)

Reprobate concerning the faith. (2 Timothy 3:8)

How May The Reprobate Be Known?

By final impenitence and accusing Christ of collusion with Satan.

Scripture Proof:

1. There is a sin unto death. (1 John 5:16)

There are sins which are unto death spiritual and evangelical, that is, are inconsistent with spiritual life in the soul and with an evangelical right to life above, such as total impenitence and unbelief. (Matthew Henry)

2. The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. (Matthew 12:31)

[In context, Matthew 12.22-37,] the comparing of Christ's miracles with His doctrine evidenced that He was so far from being in league with Satan, that He was at open enmity and hostility against him (v.29) . . . This blasphemy [of ascribing Christ's miracles 'to a collusion with Satan'] 'is therefore

unpardonable, because . . . there is no cure for a sin so directly against the remedy.’ (Matthew Henry)

This sin . . . is called *a blasphemy against the Holy Ghost* because this sin devilishly opposes the supernatural work of the Holy Ghost who convinces the mind that *Jesus is the Son of God*, the only Saviour of the world . . . Now this sin is called unpardonable, not because it cannot *be* forgiven, but because it never *is* forgiven. The man that falls into this sin never repents, nor gets grace to desire to repent, but does as a devil desperately go on to oppose Jesus Christ. (David Dickson)

Who Oppose This Doctrine?

The Quakers and others err who maintain that God never ordained any man to perish eternally. (David Dickson)

What Practical Lessons Does This Doctrine Teach?

The worldly wise and prudent men in this world are not those for the most part to whom the gospel is revealed. (David Dickson)

The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending the will of God revealed in his word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the Gospel. (Westminster Confession of Faith. III. viii)

Beware of a reprobate mind, the effect of refusing to have God in our knowledge. (Romans 1.28) Beware of being reprobate concerning the faith, having a perverse moral sense and a mind beclouded with our own speculations. (2 Timothy 3.8) Beware of being reprobate to every good work. (Titus 1.16) J.M.B.

***Conclusion to the Series:
What Practical Lessons Do All These Doctrines Of
Grace Teach?***

Those who truly come to God for mercy come as beggars, and not as creditors: they come for mere mercy, for sovereign grace, and not for anything that is due. (Jonathan Edwards)

In our Lord Jesus there is much ground of praise . . . and it should be the task of all creatures in heaven and earth to be setting forth His praise: all these companies [i.e. the redeemed Church, elect angels, and every creature] say: *Worthy is the Lamb*. (James Durham)

.....

O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me. (Isaiah 12.1)

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Romans 11.33)

Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. (Philippians 4:4)

We will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. (Isaiah 25:9)

Now unto the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1.17)

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing . . . Thou art worthy . . . for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood . . . Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. (Revelation 5:12,9,13)

Gripped by the Promises of God

Introduction

The brothers Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine were gripped by the promises of God. Taking their cue by the Holy Spirit from Scripture, which represents God's promised blessings as free gifts, graciously bestowed, they felt that without the promises they had no Good News for sinners at all. Says Ralph Erskine: "Take away the promise out of the Bible and you take away the Gospel" (*Works* 5.118), while Ebenezer asks rhetorically: "What is the Gospel but a word of promise?" (*Works* 1.262)

They also had many precedents in Scottish church history. The original *Scots Confession* speaks of "assured faith in the promises of God." The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, their subordinate standard of doctrine, states that a principal work of saving faith is "embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come." The sermons of Andrew Gray, James Durham, James Renwick and Thomas Halyburton, prominent influences on their piety, are replete with the promises. After all, says Halyburton: "God binds Himself to us with His promises." And does not the young Covenanter Renwick exult in them? "The believer cannot but have a happy life," he claims, "when He has four things which the Scripture calls precious: the precious redemption of the soul, a precious faith, a precious Christ and precious promises. And the redemption of the soul, which is precious, is by a precious faith, laying hold on a precious Christ, held forth in precious promises." Little wonder, then, that the Erskine brothers devoted so much of their preaching in unfolding the promises of God. Indeed, it was out of hearts full of the promises personally appropriated that they speak. Testifies Ralph: "I will look to the promise, and lay stress upon it, and upon a God that promises." (5.236)

Covenant Promises

For both of them, the promises were expressions in time of God's gracious covenant purposes framed in eternity. Ebenezer speaks

for them both when he defines the promises as the “revelation of His counsel and purpose of grace before the world began.” (1.431) That counsel and purpose, adds Ralph, concerns “His grace and good-will to sinners in Christ.” (5.192) Hence, all the promises of the covenant of grace “are so many *I wills*. I will be your God; I will take away the heart of stone; I will put my Spirit within you.” (5.375) Preaching from Galatians 4.28 – “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise” – Ralph informs us: “God Himself is the great matter of the promise.” He then adduces Ezekiel 36.28, Jeremiah 31.33 and Hebrews 8.10 as divinely-written proof, concluding: “It is the greatest promise in all the Bible . . . Eternity, diving into this deep, will never reach the bottom of it.” Further, “as God promises Himself, so He promises His Son.” In fact, “He is called ‘the mercy promised’ (Luke 1.72).” Not only so, “the Spirit Himself is . . . promised. (Ezekiel 36.27; John 16.7)” And along with the entire Godhead is promised “all things else.” He then lists no less than twenty particular promises made to every one who believes. Quoting Romans 8.32, “O consider,” he exclaims, “what unsearchable riches . . . of grace and glory are in these mines . . . and what a blessed thing it is to be the children of promise!” (*Beauties* I. 276-281)

Gospel Promises

It is in the Gospel, claim the Erskines, that the promises are fulfilled to believers, and it is the promises that give power to the Gospel. In a sermon entitled *The Pregnant Promise* Ralph asserts the glorious truth that God’s “powerful and prolific promise” is His chosen means of saving His elect. (5.108) When He speaks with the intention of saving them, He gives “being to His promises” (5.382), just as He gave being to light by His mere *fiat*: “Let light be.” Once the promise of salvation is received by faith, this selfsame power sustains the believer throughout his entire Christian life. The invincible power of the faithful promise Maker ensures his preservation. The permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit has the elect’s preservation especially in view. (5.101)

Promises in Christ

In a beautiful analogy, Ralph Erskine describes the Gospel promise as a cup containing Christ. In the act of taking up the cup of promise, the believer's faith does not merely look inside at its contents: he actually drinks in Christ by the Spirit-given power of appropriation. (1.126) The more he drinks, the more he is filled with the goodness and glory of Christ. "The Gospel promises," then, "are nothing else but that opening up of the unsearchable riches of Christ." (*Beauties* I. 277)

Fully in keeping with this view, Ebenezer emphasizes in another popular analogy: "All . . . promises . . . of the Word point us to Him, as the needle in the mariner's compass points to the pole-star . . . Our preaching, and your hearing, is in vain, unless we bring you to the knowledge of Christ." (2.7-8) Following the Puritan Richard Sibbes, who says something almost identical, Ebenezer adds: "the more of Christ" there is "in any text, the more . . . savour and sweetness will be in [the sermon] to the soul that knows Him." (2.8)

Comprehensive Promises

In their attempts to do justice to the richness of God's promises, the Erskines strive to convince us that for every condition of every believer there is a suitable promise. "What can you desire that is not in the promise?" asks Ralph. Then follows a comprehensive list of needs that the promises are designed to meet. (5.259-260) Ebenezer says the same. Preaching on the leaves of the tree that are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22.2), he assures us that there is no ailment they cannot cure. "What is your disease, O sinner?" he cries. "Whatever it may be, you will find a leaf on this tree that can heal you." (1.502) And so Ralph challenges: "Tell me one case that the promise does not reach." (5.118)

In a characteristically winsome way, Ralph goes on to portray poor sinners as fish swimming in the pools of this world. The true "fisher of men" will let down "a bundle of promises" on hooks of every shape and size so as to catch them. Yet the fish must do their

part. “If one hook is too large for you, another will suit you better. If one promise does not fit you, go to another.” (5.128-130)

Unconditional Promises

To combat any legalism lurking in our minds, and to encourage sinners who might hold back because of their keen sense of guilt and unworthiness, the Erskines make much of the unconditional nature of God’s promises. Neither of them can bear the clogging of “the glorious Gospel . . . with legal terms, conditions and qualifications.” (Ralph. 1.152)

Since every condition for salvation has already been met by God Himself in Christ, the sinner has nothing to do to be saved but embrace Christ in the Gospel promises. Not one promise, Ralph asserts, contains a condition “to keep back a soul from applying and taking hold” of it. (5.129) To teach otherwise is to throw the desperate sinner back onto the law of works, in which there is no salvation. Never forget, warns Ralph: “The law is a precept; the Gospel is a promise.” (5.164-165) “The law runs in a . . . strain [of] commands and threatenings . . . the law begets fear and dread;” by contrast, “the Gospel begets hope.” Therefore, “happy they, who, being terrified by the law, are made to flee away to the Gospel . . . for there lies all your salvation.” (5.193)

Not even faith is a condition of salvation. Both of the Erskines concur with Robert Traill, who says: “Faith in Jesus Christ . . . is neither condition nor qualification.” Rather, says Ralph: it is “the hand that receives Christ.” (3.476) Therefore, urges Ebenezer: “Let faith view a God in Christ . . . as its own God . . . with its appropriating *my* . . . And if you ask upon what ground doth faith go in laying claim to a God in Christ as its own God, I answer . . . the covenant grant and promise through Him . . . ‘I will be your God, and ye shall be my people.’ Faith sets to its Amen unto the grant, and says, ‘This God in my God for ever;’ and it shall be so because He has said it.” (*Beauties* 323-324)

Thus faith is “the way of the Gospel” but not the condition of the Gospel. (Ralph 5.16) Indeed, to clinch the argument, Ralph concludes that faith itself is promised, in such texts as Psalm 110.3 – “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.” If it is to be viewed as a condition at all, it is because without faith we cannot be saved.

Promises as Warrants to Believe

If there is one major contribution to our understanding of the application of the Gospel that the Erskines make, it is the marked difference they perceive between the warrant to believe and the ability to believe. The warrant to believe, they say, is to be found in the Gospel promises and commands. The ability to believe is given by the Holy Spirit.

This is why they took such pains to preserve the Gospel way of salvation pure, uncontaminated by legalism. “If any clog the Gospel offer with legal terms and conditions,” warns Ralph, “they encroach upon the warrant ministers have to offer Christ to all, and the warrant that all have to receive Him; yea, they encroach upon sovereign grace.” (*Beauties* I. 178)

Yet do not misunderstand, he cautions, the free and universal offer of Christ is no concession to Arminianism. “Let Arminians maintain, at their peril, their universal redemption; but we must maintain, at our peril, the universal offer.” For good measure, he reminds us: “it is no presumption . . . to take what God gives.” In view of the universal warrant, “we cannot say, ‘You are an elect man, you are an elect woman, therefore believe’: we have no such commission;” but “God, by this Gospel, casts the covenant in among all the people, saying, ‘Whosoever will, let him take’, and in taking, he shall have a proof of his being an elect vessel.” “It is,” therefore, “for the elect’s sake that the reprobate have an offer of Christ.”

In short, the Gospel is to be preached to all, and Christ is to be offered to all, so that God may, out of all who hear it, “make the

Gospel offer the channel of His power” to gain the elect to Himself. So, he concludes: “I offer then . . . a whole Christ to you, in His Father’s name . . . will you not take, when God gives?” (*Beauties* I. 183-186)

In a word, “the grace, mercy and goodness of a promising God, revealed and proclaimed in the Word, is a noble ground for sinners, and yet more for saints, to trust Him, and draw near to Him through Christ, with a full assurance of faith,” as Psalm 36.7 expresses the matter: “How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God, therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.” (Ebenezer: *Beauties* 48)

By way of warning, Ralph solemnly reminds us: If you wait “till you be in a better condition . . . you will wait to the day of judgment, and in the mean time inevitably perish at death; and all your terms, conditions and good qualifications will perish with you.” (1. 148) Joseph Hart says the same:

‘If you tarry till you’re better
You will never come at all.’

Conditional Promises

Once faith “leans upon a God in Christ” for salvation, Christ “brings a glorious retinue of graces with Him” (Ebenezer: *Beauties*. 325), such as repentance, humility, zeal for God’s glory, patience, love, joy and peace. These graces then reside in his heart through His indwelling Spirit.

As the believer is to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, God gives further promises that stimulate and promote that growth and knowledge. These are conditional promises, because they address the very graces that must be exercised as a condition for receiving the promised blessings. The Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount are supreme examples. (Matthew 5.3-11)

Of the several graces the Erskines mention to which God makes specific promises, we select Gospel humility. “Get Christ to dwell

in your heart by faith,” urges Ebenezer, for “the more of Christ, the more humility.” (Ebenezer: *Beauties* 571) It is to humility that God promises more grace (1 Peter 5.5), His reviving presence (Isaiah 57.15) forgiveness and healing (2 Chronicles 7.14)

Thus, continuous believing reception of the promises is essential to holiness. Again Ralph provides a typical homely example when he compares the believer to a woman at her spinning wheel. With one hand she holds the thread and draws it down, with the other she turns the wheel. So the believer holds God’s promises with the hand of faith, while with the other he does works of obedience. (3.425)

Conclusion

An article is too confined a space in which to explore all the ramifications of God’s promises in the Erskines’ writings. But one thing is certain: they were gripped by those promises as few have been. Not only do the promises permeate their handling of the covenant of grace, the Old Testament predictions and types of Christ, the various New Testament doctrines drawn from His person and work; they weave themselves into the very warp of their daily thinking. Personal references in their correspondence and diary entries testify to their own saving interest, as William Guthrie would say, in the promises of a covenant-making, covenant-keeping God. May we strive, in prayer and study and speech and conduct, to follow their good example, and so, in the Lord’s time, join them who now, through a life of faith and patience, inherit the promises.

Afternote

The impetus, general outline and many of the quotations in this article come from Joel Beeke’s *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Reformation Heritage Books. 2004. 266-287) Some years ago Joel gave me permission to use any of his writings. For this I am truly grateful. Ed.

Puritans and Covenanters (Continued)

The Covenanters' Distinctive Principles

Introduction

The three distinctive principles undergirding the Scottish Covenanters' testimony are as follows:

1. Christ is Lord of the Conscience
2. Christ is the only Head of His Church
3. Christ is to be acknowledged in a Free State

These principles are embodied in their covenants, renewed and adapted throughout their history according to need.

Let us consider them.

1. Christ is Lord of the Conscience

This principle may be stated more fully as: **“Christ, and Christ alone, by His Word and Spirit, is the only Lord of the conscience.”**

At the very dawn of the Scottish Reformation, when Adam Wallace was accused in 1551 of ‘such horrible crimes of heresy as were never before heard or thought of in the kingdom,’ the principle is beautifully stated in Wallace’s reply to his accusers: “My lords, I never said nor taught anything but what I found written in this Book, which is the Word of God; and if you be content to judge me by the Word of God, here it is, and what I have said wrong, for that I shall be content to suffer punishment, for never said I anything concerning this accusation but what I found in this Book.”

An example of the power with which this principle took hold of men’s minds may be seen in the case of Lord Ruthven, Provost of Perth at the time of the First Reformation. Commanded by the Queen Regent to suppress the Reformers in his town, he replied: “I

can make their persons and their goods subject to your Majesty, but I have no power over their minds and consciences.”

In his confrontations with Queen Mary, Knox checked her claim that conscience told her that the Church of Rome was the true Church of God with the retort: “Conscience, Madam, requires knowledge. And I fear that right knowledge have ye none.”

Two generations later, when Charles I sought to impose High Anglicanism on his Scottish subjects, Lord Loudon told him: “The people of Scotland will obey you in everything with the utmost cheerfulness, provided you do not touch their religion and their conscience.”

In 1647, when the old *Scots Confession* was replaced by the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the same truth is boldly asserted in chapter 20, paragraph 2: “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His Word.”

We also find the same testimony near the close of the covenanting period. Addressing Christian friends for the last time before her execution in 1681, Marion Harvie said: “I adhere to the holy and sweet Scriptures of God, which have been my rule in all I have done, in which my soul has been refreshed . . . I adhere to the Confession of Faith BECAUSE agreeable to the Scriptures.” This is the essence of the Covenanters’ testimony on this point. Through out their history, they rested on such Scriptures as Matthew 23.10; Acts 4.19 and 5.29; James 4.12.

2. Christ is the only Head of His Church

If Christ is Lord of the individual conscience, the Covenanters claimed, He is also Lord of the Church’s conscience. He alone is her Head, and her life and character must not be taken from Rome, or Canterbury, nor even Geneva, but from His own authoritative Word. This is why the framers of the 1560 Confession laid down

as the leading mark of the ‘true Kirk’ that she “always heareth and obeyeth the voice of her own Spouse and Pastor.”

John Welsh, Knox’s son-in-law, gave as the special reason for his imprisonment in Blackness Castle that “first . . . Christ is the Head of His Church; secondly, that she is free in her government from all jurisdictions except Christ’s.”

So too in 1649 the Preamble to an act of parliament expressly acknowledges the Kingship of Christ by stating: “everything in the house of God must be ordered according to His will and commandment.”

When the covenanting minister John Livingstone was ordered to leave his charge at Ancrum, he reminded his flock: “the prerogative royal of Jesus Christ, and the peace of a man’s own conscience, are not to be violated on any consideration.”

Isabel Alison also, about to suffer martyrdom, issued as her testimony: “I lay down my life for adhering to Jesus Christ, His being a free King in His own house.”

3. Christ is to be acknowledged in a Free State

Since religious freedom is the great bulwark of civil freedom, we find the Covenanters asserting the rule of Christ over the State. Their view was that, as ‘King of nations’ Christ should be acknowledged in a free state, governed by a freely elected parliament, and that His Word should be the directory of the conscience of the nation.

Two writers in particular gave this principle great prominence: George Buchanan and Samuel Rutherford.

Buchanan’s treatise *De Jure Regni apud Scotos* (1579) denounces both tyranny and anarchy in the boldest terms, placing both rulers and people subject to justice as embodied in the Moral Law of God. The laws by which every nation should be governed, he claimed, are derived not only from “the inmost recesses of nature,”

but have also been specifically “ordained by God, explained by His inspired prophets, and confirmed by the Son of God, Himself also God.” Furthermore, it is sin “to add, to retrench, to repeal or alter a single article in those laws.” Consequently all civil authority is to be “circumscribed and confined to fixed limits” so that civil rulers are “to exhibit a living example of divine justice.”

Samuel Rutherford’s *Lex Rex* re-affirms all Buchanan’s major conclusions. In a series of intricate arguments it proves that “truth to Christ cannot be treason to Caesar,” adding forcefully: “the conscience of the monarch and the conscience of the inferior judges are equally *under immediate subjection to the King of kings*.” Acting on Christ’s behalf, the civil ruler is to be the “keeper, preserver and avenger of God’s law.”

Many a Covenanting sermon, commentary and testimony echoes these sentiments, thereby rooting the principle into the heart of the nation. Says David Dickson, for example: “It is no disparagement to the greatest monarchs to be subject to Christ Jesus, to stand in awe of Him, to submit themselves to Him, and promote His service to their power; for the command to all and to them in special is: ‘Serve the Lord in fear.’ (*Commentary on Psalm 2.11*)” The government’s repeated refusal to give Christ the kiss of allegiance drew from the Covenanting martyr Donald Cargill the lament: “I thought it was as if I had seen one wearing my Husband’s garments after he had killed Him.”

Principles embodied in Covenants

These three principles asserting the sole Headship of Christ over the individual, the Church and the State were embodied in a series of covenants. Joshua’s example (Joshua 24.1-28) and later Biblical renewals of the covenant (Solomon in 1 Kings 8 and Ezra 10) were adduced as precedents. Those who subscribed to them, including some of the noblest in the land, were resolved to give their lives in maintaining them. Indeed, many of them did so, both in the fields and on the scaffold.

The *National Covenants* of 1580 and 1638, along with the *Solemn League and Covenant* of 1643, are the most prominent banners displayed because of the truth in Scotland's chequered history. They were rallying points around which the soldiers of Christ gathered to fight the good fight of faith.

Although the late Professor G. D. Henderson stated fifty or so years ago that there was no likelihood of the covenants being renewed today, a return to Scotland's covenanted God is her most pressing need. As he mounted the scaffold before his judicial murder, Donald Cargill expressed the hope that one day the nation would return to her forsaken God. "The covenants, the covenants," he cried, "shall yet be Scotland's reviving!"

Conclusion

The covenanting principle has far-reaching consequences for our nation today. With the blessing of God, its faithful implementation would be the means of converting many to Christ and a God-fearing, upright way of life; of cleansing the professing Church of its unauthorised and unworthy elements; and of reforming the state till it would reflect the righteousness God requires of us in the Bible. "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." (Proverbs 14.34)

The historian Kirkton confirms this when, writing of the period "between the signing and the sifting" (1638-1660) he recalls: "Every parish had a minister, every village had a school, every family almost had a Bible." Children were found reading the Scriptures, swearing was almost unheard anywhere, and throughout large areas of the country "you would not have lodged in a family where the Lord was not worshipped by reading, singing and public prayer." Indeed, "every minister was a very full professor of the Reformed religion." The Anglican Bishop Burnet tells the same story: "The ministers were so full of the Scriptures, and so ready at extempore prayer, that from that they grew to extempore sermons. They had brought the people to such a degree of knowledge that cottagers and servants could have prayed

extempore . . . As they [the ministers] lived in great familiarity with their people, and used to pray and to talk often with them in private, so it can hardly be imagined to what a degree they were revered and loved by them.”

Not only so, the crown rights of King Jesus became the very motto of the nation’s military life. When the gallant Scots army lay at Dunse-muir (1639), notes the historian Stevenson: “each captain had his colours flying at his tent door, whereon was this inscription in letters of gold: CHRIST’S CROWN AND COVENANT.”

As the 21st century proceeds, there is not even ‘a cloud the size of a man’s hand’ indicating a desire to renew our covenant with God. As the late Finlay Beaton of Inverness once said: “This nation has been taken higher than any other since Old Testament Israel in being in covenant with God, and no nation has been brought lower after such a privilege.” How are the mighty fallen!

I will make my covenant between thee and me. Genesis 17.1-2

He hath made with me an everlasting covenant. 2 Samuel 23.5

I have made a covenant with my chosen. Psalm 89.3

I the LORD . . . will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles. Isaiah 42.6

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people . . . to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant. Luke 1.68,72

This is the covenant . . . I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people . . . For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more. Hebrews 8.10,12

Incidental Testimony to the Judicial Meaning of the term Justification

There should be no doubt in our minds that many professing Protestants are ready to accept Rome's view of justification; i.e. that it makes our natures holy. In so doing they betray both Holy Scripture and their Reformation heritage.

Let us consider a few *incidental* testimonies to the judicial meaning of the term; i.e. that justification is "not the making of our natures holy, but the . . . declaring of our persons righteous in law." (John Brown of Haddington) The Greek scholar W. E. Vine confirms this understanding: "justification . . . the legal and formal acquittal from guilt by God as Judge, the pronouncement of the sinner as righteous, who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ." (See Romans 3.24-26) It is therefore the opposite of condemnation.

Several passage of Holy Scripture teach this truth *directly*:
"If there be a controversy between men, and they come into judgment, that the judges may judge them, then they shall *justify* the righteous, and *condemn* the wicked." (Deuteronomy 25.1)

"He that *justifieth* the wicked, and he that *condemneth* the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD." (Proverbs 17.15)

"Therefore being *justified* by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5.1), along with "There is therefore now *no condemnation* to them which are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8.1)

There are other passages, however, that give *incidental testimony* to the judicial meaning of justification:

In Isaiah 43.8-13 God challenges idolaters to produce proofs of the deity of their false gods: "Let them bring forth their witnesses, that

they may be justified.” The scene invoked is a court of law, not a hospital or surgery.

When Job answers his false accusers, his defence consists of an appeal to the Judge of all the earth (Job 13.1-19): “Behold now, I have ordered my cause, I know that I shall be justified.” (v.18) His upright conscience testified to his integrity in such a way that, whatever charge they brought against him, he was sure the Lord would clear him of it. In the same way, every sincere believer may be sure that whoever lays a false charge against him, he will be justified in the court of heaven. (Romans 8.33) Again, the whole context is forensic.

Finally, when our Lord Jesus Christ says: “by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned,” his reference is to the Day of Judgment. (Matthew 12.36-37)

Justification is a divine sentence, not a divine cure. Justification gives believers a right and title to the cure, but it is not itself the cure. That cure is sanctification.

May we ask the Lord for grace to be aware of and resist the slightest temptation to deviate from the true Biblical meaning of justification.

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Special Notice

In keeping with the stated aims of the Sovereign Grace Union, the Committee has agreed to allocate books setting forth the doctrines of grace to students who are being called to minister to the churches. Anyone wishing to benefit by this grant of books should apply in writing or e-mail to the Treasurer, whose name and address may be found inside the front cover of *Peace and Truth*.

A Reformed Guide to Western Classical Music

Introduction

In winding up his magnificent exposition of the sovereignty of grace in salvation, the apostle Paul writes: “For of Him, and through Him, and unto Him, are all things.” (Romans 11.36) That is, from God as the Source, through God as the Means, to God as the End, all things exist and have their purpose.

This comprehensive statement includes Music. For at the dawn of time “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God (i.e. holy angels) shouted for joy.” (Job 38.7) This is the Song of Creation.

At the end of time, the ransomed of the Lord will sing: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.” (Revelation 5.12) This is the Song of Redemption.

Between times, throughout the entire length of human history, music is integral to man’s life everywhere, as an activity of both the wicked (Job 21.7,11-12) and the righteous. (Psalm 98.1-6)

We must therefore give it serious consideration, and not dismiss it out of hand simply because it was first developed in the line of Cain (Genesis 4.21) or because it has no appeal to us.

Who teaches angels, the redeemed and the ungodly “the noble art or science of music”? asks Karlheinz Stockhausen. God, he replies, the “greatest of all composers.” It is God who created the harmony of the spheres, who placed “the stuff of music” within man’s reach, and who bestows on certain individuals the ability to compose, perform and appreciate music. We begin, then, with Him.

The Music of Nature

We are born into a world of music. The rhythm of the seasons, the pulse of our heartbeats, the wind-blown whistling of lakeside reeds, singing sands, birdsong and such phenomena as Fingal’s

Cave on Staffa (which the Celts called ‘Cave of Music’), all place within reach of our wonderfully constructed ears (Psalm 94.9) the materials from which music is made. Though it is a far cry from Jubal’s primitive harp and panpipes to Mozart’s Concerto for Flute and Harp, their origin is the same. God has placed musical resources in the world, and has mandated us to use them. (Genesis 1.28) Being made in His image, we derive our creative, executive and appreciative ability from Him. Music is one of the many means of expression He implanted in us when He made us. This is why men make music all over the world. Every nation and tribe has its own distinctive musical culture, which it has developed through imitating and cultivating nature.

The Power of Music

The power of music over us is recognized worldwide. It has power to organize and put fighting mettle into men, as in military marches; to induce ecstasy, as in dervish dancing and certain types of ‘pop’ music; to heighten speech, as in songs and Welsh preaching; to depress, as at Buddhist funerals; to uplift, as in Handel’s *Hallelujah Chorus*; to soothe, as with King Saul on hearing David’s harp; to “ravish the soul,” as Robert Burton says in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*; to terrify, as in Prokofiev’s *Ivan the Terrible*; in short, to “raise or quell” every human emotion.

Among the 16th century Protestant Reformers, Martin Luther observed music’s power to move our feelings; as “mistress and queen of the emotions of the human heart,” he says, music can even control us. “For if you want to revive the sad, startle the jovial, encourage the despairing, humble the conceited, pacify the raving, mollify the hate-filled . . . what can you find that is more effective than music?”

John Calvin too acknowledged music’s “well-nigh incredible power to move us whenever it will.”

A millennium earlier, Augustine was so moved by the congregational singing of the Psalms in Milan Cathedral that he wept “copious tears.”

By the mysterious power of God invested in it, then, music is able to penetrate deep into the core of our consciousness and call forth the most varied emotions.

Should anyone doubt this power, let him only attend a wedding where the *Prelude to Act Three* of Wagner’s *Lohengrin* is played, or a public memorial service at which Chopin’s so-called *Funeral March* is performed by a military band, or a Scottish Highland Communion Service, when the Gaelic Psalms are sung from hearts that have been stirred to the depths, or a Welsh rugby match, when the old Welsh hymns and the Welsh *National Anthem* peel around the terraces from impromptu male voice choirs.

Three Ruling Principles

Holy Scripture lays down three ruling principles that should regulate all our musical activity, in composing, performing and listening. A study of these principles should lead us to certain conclusions. These in turn should enable us to select from the many options available to us what is pleasing to God. In this article, we will concentrate on the western ‘classical’ tradition, since this has developed in a professedly Christian context.

1. A Gift from God

God, writes Paul to Timothy, has “given us all things richly to enjoy.” (1 Timothy 6.17) Music is one of the most refined and beautiful of these gifts.

The devout music theorist Andreas Werckmeister (1686) acknowledged this when he wrote: “Music . . . has its origin from God and has been granted to mankind as a glorious gift from the Creator.”

From this truth we infer that:

- a. Our thoughts and feelings should not be confined to the music itself, nor to its performers, nor to the pleasure we derive from it, but should pass beyond these to the Lord, its Giver.
- b. We should thank Him for His tender concern to alleviate through the sounds of music some of the many burdens brought on us by sin.
- c. We should view music as a gift to all mankind, not to any specially privileged class. This is a safeguard against musical snobbery, of which there is a great deal in some musical circles.

2. For the Glory of God

Since God is the Giver of every good and perfect gift, all our musical activities should be engaged in for His glory. “Whatsoever ye do,” writes Paul, “do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10.31) That is, have such thoughts of God and live such lives to God as will bring Him honour.

The world’s greatest Christian composer, Johann Sebastian Bach, took this view. “The aim,” he said, “of all music should be nothing else but the glory of God . . .” Bach himself set us the example by inscribing his scores *S. D. G. = Soli Deo Gloria = Solely to the Glory of God.*

For us this means that:

- a. We should never transfer to composers, conductors, performers or ‘budding child prodigies’ the glory that belongs to God alone. We must keep ourselves from every form of musical idolatry.
- b. We should not allow ‘entertainment music’ to become a vehicle for the worship of God. It is an abomination to Him to hear congregations applauding themselves and their ‘worship leaders’ after avowedly singing *His* praises.
- c. We should firmly refuse to engage in any music that is unworthy of Him, and in which we cannot enjoy His presence.
- d. By the same token, we should choose to participate in only such music by which we may glorify and enjoy Him.

3. For Our Enjoyment

Besides the proof text already cited (1 Timothy 6.17) we have numerous occasions in Bible history when music was employed to enhance celebrations, both civic and ecclesiastical. (1 Samuel 18.6; 1 Chronicles 15.16; Nehemiah 12.36; Ecclesiastes 2.8; Luke 15.25) Indeed, heaven itself rings with the sound of harps and voices captivated by the praise of God. (Revelation 14.2)

Both Werckmeister and Bach endorsed this view. Said the former: one of the aims of music is “the lawful refreshment of the spirit.” Bach too added that music should be used for “the permissible delight of the spirit.” Refreshment and delight – how greatly does our gracious God care for our wellbeing in this vale of tears!

Luther and Calvin both recommended the enjoyment of music. Said Luther: “Music is an outstanding gift of God, and next to theology . . . youth should be taught this art.” Again: “Music is a very fine art. The notes can make the words come alive.” Consequently, in “the common use of music . . . Christian musicians should let their singing and playing to the praise of the Father of all grace sound forth with joy from their organs and whatever other beloved musical instruments there are.” Luther himself was a skilful lutenist, singer and composer.

Calvin’s remarks are just as appreciative, though fewer: “Among other things to recreate man and give him pleasure, music is either first or one of the principal, and we must value it as a gift from God.” Though he was no practicing musician, Calvin accepted Paul’s remark to Timothy, saying that we are “to enjoy the vast bounty and variety of good things” God has given us, for everything in the world is “intended to make men rejoice.” The sole exception, he adds, is sin. “Away then with that inhuman philosophy” that allows only “the necessary use of created things.” Calvin was no kill-joy.

We cannot fail to note the Reformers' emphasis on the sheer generosity of God, in giving us both music and the right to derive pleasure from it.

In passing, we would remind picky consciences that Christians do not need to know the character or lifestyle of composers and performers of music any more than they need to know who bakes their daily bread or built the house they live in. Neither do they need to know whether or not musicians were or are born again. "Common gifts," said Matthew Henry, "are given to bad men." Music is the common heritage of mankind. The enjoyment of good music by bad men is lawful.

Good and Bad Music

But now the question arises: What is good music? Music-loving moralists and aestheticians (writers on beauty in music) have reasoned long and laboriously to answer this question.

Here we can only offer guidelines.

1. The poet Ezra Pound provided us with a general yardstick when he wrote: "bad art . . . makes false reports . . . If an artist falsifies his report as to the nature of . . . God . . . of good and evil . . . then that artist lies. By good art I mean art that bears true witness."

Here is a commendable attempt to address a fundamental issue in music. Yet we need nice discernment to separate the precious from the vile.

Let us take an example. What is opera? Augustine sheds light on the issue when he confessed to God that in the theatre at Carthage he wept over Dido's love for Aeneas, but could not weep for his lack of love for God. That is, he could enjoy vicarious pain through the spectacle of a theatrical, but found himself in no personal pain because he did not love his Maker and Redeemer.

Applying this principle, we ask: What is the subject of Alban Berg's opera *Wozzeck*? Barrack life, a squalid remorseful woman,

and a blood-curdling murder. Hauntingly beautiful as its music is, its ‘morality’ is no subject for entertainment.

With very few exceptions (e.g. Wagner’s *Mastersingers of Nuremberg*) operas are full of such things: sinful intrigues, marital unfaithfulness, unrequited love, dabblings in the occult, murders and suicides. They may represent life in the raw since the Fall of Man, but they falsify their witness by treating these things as ‘normal’ and proffering them for entertainment. That such things exist among us is food for grief, not vicarious pleasure or emotional release.

An observation by Wilfrid Mellers, former Professor of Music at York University, may be helpful at this point. All Wagner’s operas except *The Mastersingers*, he said, are perversions of the Christian Gospel. Man finds himself in a predicament, but he is redeemed not by the Lord Jesus Christ, but by a woman.

Ballets and ‘musicals’ too are full of staged artificialities that mimic real life, besides encouraging their performers to live in a ‘pretend’ world. [The word ‘hypocrite’ originated in the Greek theatre; that is, the actors spent their lives pretending to be someone else.] Not only that, it is almost impossible working in such surroundings for the performers to resist the temptation to sexual immorality and perversity, and to fall into a ceaseless round of ‘post-performance’ drinking parties. A Christian man of my acquaintance tried playing in a well-known symphony orchestra. After a while, he found rehearsals and performances pleasurable but the lifestyle impossible. Before long, he left.

Having said this, we believe it is lawful for Christians to listen to keyboard and orchestral arrangements of opera, ballet and theatricals, without knowing their plots or being sucked into their false worlds. The *Prelude* to Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*, the *Intermezzo* from Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana*, the *Suites* from Prokofiev’s *Romeo and Juliet*, Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty* ballets, the *Four Sea Interludes* from

Britten's *Peter Grimes*, and Stravinsky's *Firebird* and *Petrushka* are fine compositions, and can be enjoyed to the honour of God. What began life as 'programme music' may be transmuted into 'absolute music,' and so become fit for Christian consumption, freed of its theatrical associations.

In contrast to good music with bad associations is good music with good associations.

The Church cantatas of J. S. Bach offer us the highest quality music that brings with it a true report of the character and ways of God, of good and evil, and of man's salvation. It is the most spiritually motivated and deeply felt of all Christian art. Cantata 21 traces the journey of the Christian soul out of spiritual depression into spiritual joy, much in the manner of Psalm 42. Cantata 140 brings home the principal lesson of the Parable of the Ten Virgins with power and beauty. Cantata 197 sings the Saviour's praises with serene delight. Every cantata has its own spiritual lesson.

Heinrich Schütz, too, one of Bach's precursors in the Lutheran tradition, set nothing but Bible texts for the worship of the Kreuz-Kirche in Dresden. His dignified motet, *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord* (Revelation 14.13) not only offers comfort to the believing bereaved, it also set a precedent for such beautiful Protestant works as Bach's Cantata 106 – *God's Time is Ever the Best Time* - with its heartfelt resignation to the will of God, Peter Cornelius's *I will love Thee, my Crown and my God*, and Brahms's *How Amiable are Thy Tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts*, one of his loveliest choruses.

For their power to arouse our appreciation of God's goodness and beauty in nature Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony, Mendelssohn's *Hebrides* Overture, Berlioz's *Summer Nights*, Glazunov's *The Seasons*, Delius's *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring*, Richard Strauss's *Alpine* Symphony, Debussy's *La Mer = The Sea*, and Copland's *Appalachian Spring* (to name no others) are superb compositions.

The ‘sea change’ brought to music by the Protestant Reformation bore fruit in many masterpieces highlighting the value of the common man, as distinct from Roman Catholic ‘clergy.’ Rachmaninov’s *The Bells*, for example, takes us through four main features of human life – birth, marriage, terror and death – presented through the sounds of four different bells – silver, gold, brass and iron – in a choral-orchestral tapestry of great beauty.

Sir Edward Elgar’s evocation of Edwardian London, *Cockaigne*, Smetana’s *Ma Vlast (My Country)*, Dvořák’s *Carnival Overture*, Chabrier’s *Española*, and Ives’s Third Symphony and *Decoration Day* all draw us into different aspects of human life that God has made significant.

Thousands of fine compositions in the western classical tradition were commissioned by kings and lords, while others came to light at celebrations such as royal weddings, coronations, princely birthdays, the signing of peace treaties and national commemorations. Handel’s *Coronation* anthems, *Water Music* and *Fireworks Music*, Mozart’s *Coronation* Piano Concerto, Bach’s *Orchestral Suites* and *Brandenburg Concertos*, and Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture* belong to this *genre*. All these are lawful fare for the Reformed music lover.

Historical figures, too, have inspired many a musical masterpiece. Beethoven’s *Egmont* Overture, Moussorgsky’s *Boris Godounov*, Prokofiev’s *Ivan the Terrible*, Beethoven’s *Eroica* Symphony (Napoleon) and Liszt’s *Mazeppa* are cases in point. Usually the composer’s sensitivity to the historical figure whose life he is setting to music introduce us to the deep feelings that constrained his actions but which historians cannot evoke.

Inevitably the themes of birth, life, love and death feature prominently in the musical repertoire. Finzi’s *Dies Natalis*, Schumann’s *A Woman’s Life and Loves*, Schoenberg’s *Transfigured Night*, Schubert’s *Maid of the Mill*, Brahms’s *Academic Festival Overture* and Berg’s *Violin Concerto* are each

infused with their own particular human qualities – wonder, tenderness, longing, joy and grief – as their composers contemplate the living or their beloved dead.

2. A second solution to the problem of what music the Reformed Christian may participate in with a good conscience is Dr. Percy Scholes's insistence on 'good taste.' To the need to adhere to truth this renowned musicologist (author of the original *Oxford Companion to Music*) adds the issue of moral values. "It is very difficult," he writes, "to argue with those who support the use of bad music to lead men into good ways." That is, those who love bad music can hardly be persuaded to exchange it for good music, because in most cases they cannot tell the difference between them, nor even realize "that 'bad' exists." Bad music, he claims, cheapens, debilitates and debases the mind, whereas good music ennobles, stimulates and elevates it. When, therefore, two pieces of music have "equally strong attractive qualities, the ultimate end in view will be better attained by the use of the good."

Dr. Scholes's remarks indicate that the ability to recognize good music can be cultivated through training. When developed, this gift can discern between music that edifies and music that debases.

Significantly, while he championed the finest classical compositions, Dr. Scholes deplored the appallingly bad musical taste of the evangelistic leaders General William Booth (founder of the Salvation Army) and Moody and Sankey. Itemizing such features as the "simple reiteration of some elementary religious thought set to a 'catchy' rhythm," the "jiggling rhythms, facile melodies and commonplace harmonies of the music of street and mission hall evangelism," and the "cheap sentimentalities" of the more "respectable" churches, he stated unequivocally that they should not be "allowed to masquerade as high devotional feeling." The whole question of good and bad taste, he concludes, is not really a matter of taste at all, but "is essentially a moral question."

Using this criterion, the fastidious may safely include such masterpieces as Berlioz's *Harold in Italy*, Nicolai's *Merry Wives of Windsor Overture*, Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel Overture*, Elgar's *Falstaff* and Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* Symphony, all of which were inspired by fictional characters.

On the other hand, it should need no special pleading for us to exclude all music inspired by occult or Satanic associations, or by the worship of the Virgin Mary, the pope and 'the saints.' Schubert's, Bruckner's and Gounod's *Ave Maria*, along with Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli* and Britten's, Handel's and Purcell's Odes to *St. Cecilia* (the pagan patron saint of music!) all fall within this category.

In passing, we owe a great debt of gratitude to God for Dr. Scholes's exposure of the slander that "Puritanism was inimical to every sort of musical activity" (Johannes Wolf) and that "it was a sin" under Puritan rule "to touch the virginals" [a keyboard instrument played by Elizabeth I, the 'Virgin Queen'] (Lord Macaulay). After amassing abundant evidence to the contrary he concludes: "it is false from beginning to end."

Should the believer suffer qualms of conscience over 'programme music,' he or she may draw on a vast repertoire of 'absolute music' for enjoyment. The superb brass compositions of the two Gabrielis and their Venetian contemporaries; the Baroque concertos of Corelli, Vivaldi, Handel, Bach and Albinoni; the symphonies of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, Bizet, Bruckner, Mahler, Nielson, Sibelius, Vaughan Williams, Martinu, Rachmaninov, Hindemith, Prokofiev and Walton; the Classical and Romantic concertos of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Bruch, Rachmaninov, Prokofiev and Bartok; the piano and chamber music of all the Classic and Romantic composers; the delightful orchestral works of Ravel, Debussy, Elgar, Delius, Holst, Kodaly and Bartok; and the anthems of the 20th century English school (Parry, Stanford, Finzi,

Howells, Rutter, to name no others) should, with few exceptions, be acceptable to all Christians.

Music and the Christian Faith

The relation of music to the Christian Faith calls for brief separate treatment. For a comprehensive overview of the subject, readers may consult Andrew Wilson-Dickson's *The Story of Christian Music* (Lion Publications).

Christians have always expressed their faith through music, simply because it is able, in conjunction with Christian words, to bear their thoughts and desires by faith out of this present world into the heavenly places, where they are purified and presented to God through our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. As Dr. Scholes says: "In music lies the one effective means of communal expression. The largest bodies of worshippers may join in expressing their faith, their hope, or their charity [love] in song whose necessary simplicity seems to detract nothing from its emotional strength when it is sung with unanimity and fervour."

The 16th and 17th centuries in Europe witnessed the blossoming of a "marvelous wealth of sacred music." (John Rutter) Emerging from the ferment of the Reformation, it embraced not only the northern nations that became Lutheran or Reformed, but also the Roman Catholic south. The cantatas, motets and organ works of such masters as Pachelbel, Böhm, Buxtehude and early members of the Bach family are only some of the fruits of the German Reformation.

This proliferation of excellent 'church' music may pose a problem for the Reformed. Should they dismiss all Roman Catholic music, or filter out what conforms to Biblical principles? Let each man decide for himself. But if the setting (such as the pre-Reformation Josquin Desprez's *Ave Maria*) includes the five Marian lies about her conception, birth, annunciation, purification and assumption, we are to reject it out of hand. But some settings of *orthodox Biblical texts* by Roman Catholic composers are extremely

beautiful, and convey something of the mystery of spiritual things. Vittoria's *O Quam Gloriosum* and Bruckner's *Te Deum* are among the finest examples. We must discern, discriminate, then select.

The Reformation itself presents us with a problem of musical choice. It produced a bifurcation into Lutheran and Calvinistic factions, which in turn gave us two views of the Regulative Principle. Luther would admit into Christian worship "nothing anti-biblical," whereas Calvin drew the line at "nothing unbiblical." Luther was willing to adapt any suitable music for the worship of God. The tune *Innsbruck*, for example, was at first a Tyrolean love song. For Calvin, on the other hand, exclusive psalmody was the norm (though even he wrote a hymn, and allowed Bible 'canticles' to be sung in public worship).

Luther's understanding was more general than Calvin's. "Of old the use of music was sacred and was adapted to divine matters." He cites the Song of Moses (Exodus 15) and the Psalms, adding from Colossians 3.16: "It is good and pleasing to God to sing spiritual songs." The Early Church did so to keep "God's Word and Christian doctrine" fresh in men's minds.

To this end he composed several chorales, or German hymn tunes, with the words, and called Johann Walther, a trained musician, to Wittenberg to help him solve the problem of replacing unreformed worship (Latin masses and motets sung only by choirs) with reformed (sung by the whole congregation). He also sought out Christian poets who could "compose evangelical and spiritual songs." The result was the first Lutheran hymnbook (1524). Among these communal expressions of sturdy German piety are the well-known *Dear Christians, let us now rejoice; Our God He is a Castle Strong* and *Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word*.

Once these 'songs' were available to all, they "helped Luther's Reformation spread like wildfire, not only through the scholarly and literate, but through all levels of German society." (Rebecca Oettinger) It is no exaggeration, therefore, to say with Ulrich S.

Leupold: “the [Lutheran] reform of the mass became the shibboleth of the Reformation.” The Lutheran blossoming bore its ripest fruit two centuries later in the church cantatas of J. S. Bach, with their rich combination of soloists, choir, congregation and orchestra. Reformed believers would not be happy with these in public worship, though they could enjoy them in private.

Calvin’s contribution was to confine the singing in St. Peter’s, Geneva, mainly to the Psalms, without musical instruments. Psalm singing, he claimed, “lends dignity and grace to sacred actions, and has the greatest value in kindling our hearts to a true zeal and eagerness to pray.” It also heightens the congregation’s sense of community in the Universal Body of Christ. He disapproved of instruments in church services (though not in domestic music making) on the ground that they belonged to the Church’s infancy in Old Testament times.

In 1550 Beza completed his translation of the entire Psalter, and the professional musician Louis Bourgeois set them to music. His “grave sweet melodies” greatly enhance the Geneva Psalter (1562). Bourgeois’ principle – to set only one note to each syllable (in contrast to the Roman many-note flourishes) - made his simple, direct and solemn melodies memorable and popular throughout the Reformed world. Claude Goudimel eventually harmonized them so that they could be sung at family worship and in social gatherings. The Venetian ambassador to Geneva observed with amazement how on a certain weekday the townsfolk would shut up their shops and wend their way through the narrow streets to the cathedral, with their little black psalm books in their hands ready for psalm practice!

While Calvin urges every part of us, body and soul, to magnify the Lord, his main concern is for our hearts to “break out impulsively and impetuously with a burning affection” in worship, for God “omits no sweet melody, no sad and grave strain, to draw us to Himself, though we lie like stones” before Him. What is needed above all else is “a pure and sincere disposition of the heart.”

Conclusion

Let us conclude our scanty treatment of this important subject by reminding ourselves that the sounds that constitute music are amoral. They are neither right nor wrong, neither good nor bad, but are mere vibrations in the air. Music becomes good or bad through association. Let us look at its words, the lifestyle of the musicians who perform it, the venues where it is performed, its emotional content and the effects it has on us and others. Then let us decide what our involvement with music will be. The few principles we have sought to elucidate may provide guidelines for our choices.

Finally, let us ask ourselves:

1. Can I honour God in the music I make or love?
2. Am I soothed or invigorated, jaded or depressed by it?
3. Does it appeal to my noblest and deepest feelings, or does it merely titillate my senses?
4. Does it lead me to clean, wholesome thoughts, or does it stimulate crude, immoral or ugly thoughts and desires in me?
5. Do I idolize it, its composers and performers, or, as Paul counsels (1 Corinthians 7.31) do I use it to glorify God and refresh my spirit?
6. Does it remind me of God and His bountiful loving-kindness, and move me to thank Him for it?
7. Can I produce a Biblical warrant for the kind of music I enjoy and practice?
8. Can I ask God's blessing on the music I enjoy?

Should our conscience be clear on these points, we will concur with Johann Matheson, an 18th century musical theoretician, that “music is a noble art,” and though we shall need no lawyers in heaven, “for there will be no trials,” nor doctors giving prescriptions and purgatives, yet “the things theologians and musicians learned on earth they will also practice in heaven, that is, to praise God.”

Five Ages of Man: A Brief Survey *(Part One)*

Introduction

The writing of European history has suffered a few sea changes recently. No longer a mere structured record of the past, interpreted in the light of divine truth, as it was by such notable Protestant historians as Ranke and d'Aubigné, it has now with few exceptions become a shameless vehicle of propaganda for any number of psychological and ideological theories. Characters, motives, actions and events, causes and effects, are all being twisted and bent to fit whatever historians wish their readers to believe. Who would have dreamed a century ago, for example, that a contributor to the recent *Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology* could write: "Thomas More, despite giving his life for papal supremacy over the English church, was not a papalist"? And where today can we find a modern secular history of the Reformation that does not stigmatize Evangelical Christians as 'heretics' rather than refer to them as believers? And where are the 'scholarly' accounts of English Puritanism that does not brand it as a revolutionary movement (following the Marxist Christopher Hill) rather than a second reformation?

Today, both 'secular' and 'church' historians give their subject a distinctly ecumenical slant. That is, they expect us to read the past in terms of the present 'era of dialogue between religious equals' rather than in terms of 'radical controversy.' (Collins and Price's *Story of Christianity*, for example, is avowedly ecumenical in content and bias.) One noted modern historian even belittles sixteenth century disputes about doctrine as "useless fooleries." For our part, we believe they were neither useless nor foolish, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls hung on their outcome. Readers need to be on guard. Nothing is more deceitful than falsehood posing as truth. As John Calvin reminds us: "All [Satan's] teachers, in all ages, have presented their poison . . . in a golden cup." (Jer. 1.85) Moreover, "the Church cannot stand

unless false teachers are prevented from turning truth into falsehood.” (Zech-Mal. 380)

In an attempt to set the record straight, we shall divide the last five centuries of European thought into five convenient periods or ‘ages’: the Ages of Reformation, Orthodoxy, Reason, Romance and Hatred, and assess each as concisely and accurately as we can in the light of Biblical standards of truth. In such a survey, broad generalizations are inevitable. (During the Reformation, many anti-Reformation forces were at work. In the Age of Orthodoxy, many heresies reared their ugly heads. Throughout the Age of Reason, despite Bible critics burrowing away at the foundations of our faith, God sent revival to several nations. The Romantic period did not carry away everyone in its wild flights of imagination; some of the world’s finest preachers, missionaries and theologians appeared then. The Age of Hatred witnessed many heroic acts of self-denying love, especially during the two world wars and in humanitarian crises.) But at least the survey may help us to see roughly what went before us and how we came to be where we are.

The Age of Reformation

“No doubt there are still those who see in medieval Europe a shining crusader crowned by feudal kingship, brandishing the sword of chivalry, obedient to the voice of St. Peter, and protected by the exquisitely jointed armour of Thomist rationalism. But such deluded romantics should study the Fourth Crusade, the Albigenses, Emperor Frederick II, Philip IV of France and Boniface VIII, the Spiritual Franciscans, the Babylonian Captivity, the Council of Constance” (A.G. Dickens). Moreover, they should be aware of the European-wide burdens that papal and priestly tyranny had laid on people’s souls and pockets by the time of Luther’s defiant stand against it. These precious folk, steeped in superstition and ignorance, needed to know why the Visible Church of Christ had fallen into such a profound spiritual and moral abyss, and why their anxious concerns found no relief from all the paraphernalia of Rome. More urgent and important still,

they needed to be pointed back to God's ordained way of saving and preparing sinners to meet Him in judgment. The radical doctrinal divisions and rival views of salvation that emerged from the Reformation were not 'misfortunes', but necessities.

Once we have grasped the main issues and leading principles at stake in the Reformation conflict, we can read the details for ourselves. At stake was nothing less than Biblical Christianity. "The Reformers were eager to bring the church's beliefs and practices, its worship and message, into conformity with the Bible's teaching. It was a noble vision: purge the church of its corruptions and reform it according to God's Word" (Terry Johnson). Thus, *Sola Scriptura*, or *Scripture Alone*, became the formal principle of the Reformation. Not 'Holy Writ' plus 'Holy Tradition', but Holy Scripture without Tradition was rediscovered as the only God-given rule of faith and practice. So in opposition to Rome's two-fold authority, the Reformers placed the single authority of Scripture Alone. This principle they discovered in Scripture itself. God has spoken, they thundered, let the whole earth keep silence.

Then, *Justification by Grace, through Faith Alone*, became its material principle. Romanism confessed the Deity, Saviourhood and Atoning Merit of Christ. But to these and other truths it insisted that living faith in His spotless obedience and bloodshedding is not sufficient for a sinner's justification or standing before God. "The sinner must himself perform good works, which . . . though initiated by grace, are nonetheless *meritorious* and contribute to his final justification" (Robert Reymond, summarizing the Roman view). Both continental and British Reformers saw no such joint enterprise between the merits of Christ and the merits of man in the Word of God. To reject Paul's pure Gospel of grace, they said, is to return to Pharisaic salvation by works, which in fact do not save.

Once the two Roman foundations were destroyed and replaced by the two Biblical foundations. the rest of the papal edifice crumbled

to the ground, and poor sinners were brought in shoals into the glorious liberty of the children of God. To a man, both the leading Reformers - Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox and Cranmer - and their successors, Bugenhagen, Bullinger, Beza, Melville and Jewel – held these principles as dearly as they did their lives.

How then are we to assess the Reformation? Penetrating beneath the international settings and national figures that shaped the various forms taken by the movement, we agree with J.C. Ryle that the Reformation was the greatest movement of the Spirit of God since the days of the apostles. Writes Herbert Carson: “God had been preparing for it since the first stirrings in the fourteenth century with the ministry of John Wycliffe.” And God continued that work until it reached its pre-ordained climax in each nation to which He sent it. In Switzerland, Holland, France, Hungary and Scotland in particular, the Visible Church was stripped almost bare of its meretricious ornaments, its teachings were reduced to the essential evangelical doctrines of Holy Scripture, and clerical tyranny was struck a deathblow. In Germany, the Scandinavian countries and England, some of the old ‘limbs of antichrist’ remained, but the supreme authority of Scripture and ‘the full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice’ of Christ was preserved, and salvation by grace alone through faith alone became the hallmark of even their half-reformed churches. Despite all the Satan-inspired religious wars and political intrigues designed to hinder it, the work of God continued, through English, Dutch and American Puritanism; the testimony of the Scots Covenanters and their successors; the eighteenth century evangelical revival; and the nineteenth century worldwide missionary movement. Today, albeit in fragmented and diluted forms, its benign influence has reached the ends of the earth. How uplifting it is to see Christians from Korea, Nigeria, Brazil, Canada, Finland, India and remote Pacific islands embrace each other in Christ. Such communion is a pledge of the unity of the great congregation that shall be gathered at Christ’s Second Coming. Then all shall rejoice and exclaim with the Psalmist: “For this God is our God for ever and ever” (Psalm 48.14).

Book Reviews

Reformation Heritage Books

The Fading of the Flesh and the Flourishing of Faith – George Swinnock. 170pp. \$7.50. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-60178-072-0.

The *Puritan Treasures for Today* is a series like the Banner of Truth's *Puritan Paperbacks* series. The only changes to the original text are the smoothing out of convoluted sentences and updating of antiquated expressions. Everything by Swinnock is spiritual and practical. This extended exposition of Psalm 73.26 is no exception. It shows us how to live and how to die, how to be satisfied and how to be sanctified, how to glorify and how to enjoy God forever. We appreciate J. Stephen Yuille's sensitive editing. May God bless the entire series, as He has blessed previous works of this kind. J.M.B.

Banner of Truth Trust

Commentary on Matthew – C. H. Spurgeon. 442pp. £15.00. Hdbk. ISBN 978-1-84871-085-6.

Spurgeon was accustomed to intersperse his pulpit readings of Scripture with explanatory and practical comments. This work is a fine sample of this kind of exposition, though it began life as a written commentary penned during his last days on earth. This reviewer was gripped by its perceptiveness, pithiness and power. Let a few examples suffice to whet the reader's appetite: "The world's wise men are not often found bowing at the feet of Jesus." "We must not believe everybody who makes loud professions." "My soul, be not slow to adore thy Saviour!" "Proud men are quick to imagine insults." "Our Prince steps along a pathway paved with prophecies." "Lord, save us from a fruitless repentance." Spurgeon's deep acquaintance with Scripture, the Puritans and the human heart are evident at every turn. We recommend it without more ado. J.M.B.

Our Great God and Saviour – Eric J. Alexander. 208pp. £7.50. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-84871-084-9.

Those who sat under Eric Alexander's choice and fragrant ministry will hear the preacher's voice as they read this warm-hearted appreciation of the God he loves and adores. Echoes of Tozer, M 'Cheyne and Lloyd-Jones resound at times as Eric guides us on a short but memorable journey through the Character, Salvation and Church of God. Simple yet profound, these sermons draw liberally on Christian poets of the past as well as pour forth meditations from the author's own heart. Certain prime points struck your reviewer: God's concern for the spiritual quality of His chosen workmen rather than the work they do, our present enjoyment of glory 'in the bud' as we labour on, and our total dependence on God's sovereign grace. If you do not possess tapes or disks of Eric's ministry in the Tron Church, Glasgow, here is a most edifying readable substitute. J.M.B.

Christian Focus Publications

Deuteronomy – Allan Harman. 313pp. £8.99. Pbk. ISBN 978-184550-268-3.

Having found Allan Harman's commentary on Isaiah so valuable, I specifically requested a copy of this present title, and I am not disappointed. The author corrects the long-standing error that Deuteronomy is a second law, proving from both its content and its structure that it is a second promulgation of the covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai. Professor Harman not only demonstrates from the text the timeless validity of the Moral Law of God, but also unfolds some of its precious promises as His people prepare to settle in the Land of Promise. May we beg from Israel's God that kind of spiritual-mindedness that will enable us to prepare for the heavenly Land of Promise that He has bequeathed us through the death of His Beloved Son. J.M.B.

The Trials of Theology – eds. A.J.B.Cameron and B.S.Rosner. 191pp. £8.99. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-84550-467-0.

This is a book intended primarily for theological students, ministers and, to a lesser extent, theological teachers. It is a symposium of chapters by 11 different authors, six of whom

belong to the past (Augustine, Luther, Spurgeon, Warfield, Bonhoeffer and C.S.Lewis), and five to the present (W.J.Woodhouse, D.A.Carson, Carl Trueman, Gerald Bray and Dennis Hollinger), plus an 'afterword' by the editors.

Theological study presents its own perils, for example the temptation to lose the proper balance between intellectual study of the things of God and maintaining the spiritual 'glow' of a life lived in fellowship with God Himself, through the Holy Spirit.

The 'Voices past' deal with this matter and related matters in a general way (Spurgeon and Warfield are superb, as one might expect), while the 'Voices Present' focus on specific issues: The Trials of Theological College (a truly excellent chapter), of Biblical Studies, of Church History, of Systematic Theology and of Christian Ethics.

If you know a young man who is hoping to study theology, or is already studying it, the gift of this book could be of great benefit.

John Manton

Ebenezer Publications, Ebenezer, Westhill, Inverness. IV2 5JY. donaldboyd@btinternet.com

What's That Tune – Donald Boyd. 52pp. £3.50 + p & p. ISBN 978-1-907209-00-0.

This melody index of psalm tunes should prove a great help to those who read Sol-fa rather than Stave notation. As the system is easier to acquire than the Stave system, with all its key signatures, beginners can learn to identify psalm tunes by their opening lines at very short notice. Experienced Sol-fa users will find it a quick-reference aid. Being slim and of pocket size, the book can be carried around while traveling from place to place, as well as taken to public worship or psalmody class. A most useful tool. J.M.B.

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*Grace to the Uttermost - W Goodman,, London (Metropolitan Tabernacle) "Love so amazing, so divine" - Mark Johnston

*The Imputation of Adam's sin to us - Geoffrey Thomas, Aberystwyth

*The Imputation of our sin to Christ - Geoffrey Thomas

The Imputation of Christ's righteousness to us - Geoffrey Thomas

*The Person, Priesthood and Protection of Jesus Christ (John 18)
- Abraham Thomas

*Penal Substitution - David Cassells,, Chelmsford

Justification - Henry Sant, Portsmouth

The Blessed Consequences of Justification by Faith

- Malcolm Jones,, Maescymmer

Adoption – Robert Oliver (Bradford on Avon)

Romans 9 by Clifford Parsons of Portsmouth

*The Life and Work of John Calvin by Gervase Charmley

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*What Christ will do - and how by Neil Pfeiffer

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*Omniscience, by Paul Relf of Chatham

*Omnipotence - Something Understood, by Graham Thrussell of West Sussex

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*God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility - Gary Brady of London

*God's Full Sovereignty, our Full Salvation - Timothy Burden of Eastbourne

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