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Peace & Truth

The Magazine of the Sovereign Grace Union

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Editorial

William Williams of Pantycelyn

We Have an Altar

The Great Heresies: 5 - Nestorianism

The Gospel Minister's Preparation

Book Reviews

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Peace & Truth

The Magazine of the Sovereign Grace Union

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Aims and Objects:

To further the proclamation and defence of the doctrines of Free and Sovereign Grace.

To print and reprint literature expounding such doctrines.

To encourage publishers to issue such literature and to help its circulation by purchase and distribution to Clergy, Ministers, Christian Workers, Theological Students, Members of Parliament and others.

To hold Conferences and Meetings to re-affirm the old truths in these days of apostacy and declension.

To circulate tracts, pamphlets and books, maintaining the Doctrines of Grace, which may be presented to the Union for that purpose, and to print and circulate such tracts, etc., for which any person, or Society, undertakes to provide the funds.

To raise a testimony against the evils of Priestcraft, Popery, Ritualism, Arminianism, Rationalism, Liberalism and Higher Criticism.

Membership is open to all who are in agreement with the Basis, Aims and Objects of the Union.

Editorial

Is the Reformation over? This is a question that we have already heard raised both among Protestants and Roman Catholics in this year when many are marking the 500th anniversary of the start of that great Reformation which Martin Luther began all unwittingly when he nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg to try to begin what he thought would be merely an academic debate - albeit a very important one

The idea seems to be that the Reformation was a very good thing, it came to a medieval Church that had lost its way and was full of abuses. And now those abuses have been dealt with, the times have changed, Christianity is now threatened by the twin enemies of radical secularism and radical Islam, and we should stop fighting the battles of the past and get on with the battle of the present, a battle that would be better fought if conservative Roman Catholics and conservative Protestants would only get together.

There is a certain superficial attraction in this idea; conservative Roman Catholics and conservative Protestants have a fair amount in common, after all, we affirm Biblical morality, the inerrancy of the Scriptures, the deity and humanity of Christ, the impossibility of salvation without Christ, the historical reality of the Virgin Birth and Resurrection of Christ, and many other things. So why not join forces?

But that is just what we cannot do. Not because we are foolishly devoted to fighting the battles of the past, but because the issues of the Reformation are still central today. The five great slogans of the Reformation are called the *Solas*, from the Latin word meaning " Alone. They are:

Sola Fide: We are saved by faith alone.

Sola Gratia: We are saved by grace alone.

Sola Scriptura: Scripture alone is our ultimate authority.

Solus Christus: Salvation is by Christ alone.

Soli Deo Gloria: All for the glory of God alone.

And it is this vital word "Alone" that is vital here, and explains the reason why we are *not* fighting the battles of the past. The battle never ended.

The question is not peripheral either; it is this, *How may a man be right with God?* The conservative Roman Catholic tells us that we cannot be saved by faith alone, but by "faith formed by love," faith plus works springing out of love.

He tells us that it is not grace alone, but grace plus our co-operation with that grace. Grace is sufficient, but grace of itself saves nobody - so he says. We reply that it *is* grace alone, because God's grace always accomplishes his aim and never fails.

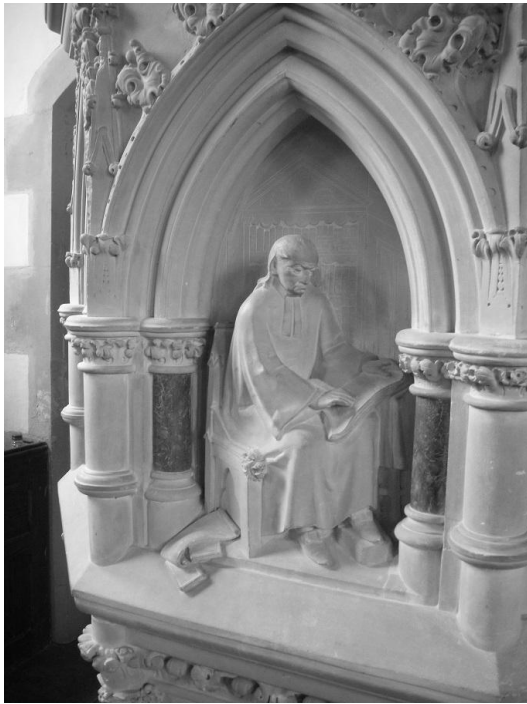
The conservative Roman Catholic tells us that the Scripture is *not* sufficient. Yes, he affirms its necessity and inerrancy, but he insists that the Bible needs to be supplemented by tradition, and can only be properly interpreted by the Magisterum of the Roman Church. For the common people to read the Bible without that guidance is, he says, dangerous. The result is that the Bible, in practice, becomes secondary to the Church, resulting in what has been called *Sola Ecclesia* as the functional principle of authority.

Formally, the Roman Catholic Church does teach that we are saved by Christ alone, but when we come to ask how that salvation is received, it is mediated, in the Roman system, through the Church and its sacraments, and outside the Church of Rome there is therefore no salvation.

So far the conservative Roman Catholic. He stands by the Council of Trent, and so while we may agree with him on matters of morality, on the very nature of the Gospel itself we are at variance. And it was on this point that the Reformation broke with Rome, and Rome with the Bible. So long as this is the case, the Reformation is *not* over, but goes on. And it must be, as the slogan is, *Semper Reformanda*, always reforming, always bringing ourselves and our Churches to the touchstone of the Word of God, that we may not be conformed to the world, but transformed by the Word.

William Williams of Pantycelyn (1)

By Dr. Gerard Charmley



Introduction

This year sees the tercentenary of the birth of William Williams, Pantycelyn, the ‘sweet singer’ of the eighteenth century Welsh revival and pre-eminent hymn-writer of Wales. The third of the great figures of the Methodist revival after Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland, Williams is claimed by Wales as a whole to a greater extent than his fellows, largely due to his hymns, which have provided comfort and spiritual nourishment to many of his countrymen. A later hymn-writer and minister has compared his influence on Wales to that of Paul Gerhardt on Germany.¹ The hymns of Williams have touched many hearts in Wales and beyond, both by his English hymns and translations of his Welsh hymns. His

1. H. Elvet Lewis, *The Sweet Singers of Wales: A Story of Welsh Hymns and their Authors* (London, no date), p.29.

greatest hymn ‘Guide me, O thou great Jehovah’ is familiar to many who know nothing of the man who penned it, being sung even by largely godless crowds at Welsh rugby matches. He has been called the ‘first Romantic poet in Europe’ by the great Welsh writer Saunders Lewis, and others have discerned in him an appreciation and understanding of the human psyche which prefigures modern psychiatry. Yet there is more to William Williams than his hymns and literary reputation – his life story is one of controversy, persecution, and, most importantly, love to Christ and a desire to see the extension of his kingdom, and his writings contain much that is still profitable to the people of God.

Early Life

William Williams was born in 1717 at his father’s house, Cefn-Coed, in the parish of Llanfair-ar-y-bryn, near Llandovery in the lovely Towy valley.² His father, John Williams, was a freeholder and senior deacon (or ruling elder) of the Independent church of Cefnarthen. His mother Dorothy was some thirty-three years her husband's junior; her family owned the nearby farm of Pantycelyn, and it is clear that she saw something in the sober deacon which the frivolous youths of Llandovery lacked. Seeing him walking past her door on his way to pay court to a lady dwelling some distance away, Dorothy admonished him that he "could find one a good deal nearer home!"³ The hint was taken, and they were soon after married.

The farm of Pantycelyn came to Dorothy on the death of her father; her two brothers had gone to an early grave, part of that strange and large-scale failure of family lines which occurred during the eighteenth century in Wales. This rendered the Williams family substantial freehold farmers in an age when many farms were held on lease from landlords, something that would afford William a secure income and base for his work in his later life.

2. There is, in fact, no known record of his birth; as a dissenter, John Williams would not have taken him to the parish church for sprinkling, and civil registration of births only commenced in 1837. The exact date of his birth is, therefore, unknown, since the records of Cefnarthen are incomplete.

3. John Morgan Jones & William Morgan (trans. John Aaron), *The Calvinistic Methodist Fathers of Wales* (Edinburgh, 2008), vol. 1, p.210.

Cefnarthfen was one of the oldest nonconformist churches in Wales, tracing its origins to 1642. During the years of persecution they had worshipped in caves and woods, ever looking out for the coming of the sheriff's men. Their chapel (since replaced) had been erected in 1689, after the accession of William and Mary had brought about a measure of toleration. By the time of William's birth, they were a prosperous fellowship; records suggest that about half the Christians in the parishes of Llanfair-ar-y-bryn and Cilycwm worshipped there on the Lord's Day. However, it was not a happy church. The minister, Roger Williams (no relation to John Williams), was an Arminian, whose views may have verged towards Unitarianism, as was the case with a substantial number of ministers in the area, influenced by men who had retained a form of godliness whilst denying the power thereof.

John Williams was able to discern the dangerous tendencies of his minister's teaching, and after the death of Roger Williams in 1730, attempted to call the church back to its Calvinistic roots by putting forward sound men to fill the pulpit. When this proved of no avail, John Williams led the Calvinistic party out of the church, and established a new fellowship in which the doctrines of grace were preached and honoured.⁴ It to be regretted that the experience of tension and distrust generated by the doctrinal controversy at Cefnarthfen during William Williams' formative years left him confused and grieved, as Calvinist and Arminian ministers contradicted each other from the same pulpit, and friends parted company, at times angrily. Looking back on the quarrels at the chapel, Williams feared many had wrangled in the flesh, and so lost sight of even more important matters. Being on the right side of the dispute came to be seen as everything, rather than being right before a holy God:

With all this empty wrangling, they lost a contrite heart
Which pined with earnest longing, in Christ to have a part.⁵

4. Eifion Evans, *Bread of Heaven: The Life and Work of Williams, Pantycelyn* (Bridgend, 2010), pp.2-3.

5. Translation quoted in Jones & Morgan, *Fathers*, p.218.

Despite these sentiments, it is not to be thought that William Williams valued unity above truth. In the course of his life, he would be drawn into many controversies, wrestling with antinomianism, Unitarianism, Sabellianism, and Sandemanianism, among other heresies. His advice was eagerly sought at Association meetings when error appeared among the Methodist societies.⁶ On his dying bed, Williams counselled the men who remained behind to winnow the Methodist societies, having discerned within many the secret workings of error.⁷ The lesson which the strife at Cefnarthyn taught the young Williams was that controversy wrongly conducted generated more heat than light and offended tender consciences. The competing preachers, each confuting the other's doctrine as the Calvinist and Arminian parties competed for ascendancy, had sown seeds of confusion in young minds, and caused the love of many to grow cold, whilst inflating pride on both sides of the divide, as those who have neither part nor lot in Christ exalt 'their own pet theme' in order to show their orthodoxy, rather than out of zeal for Christ.⁸ A party spirit had grown up, rather than a God-honouring spirit. It is a lesson which Christians are slow to learn; to conduct such matters, which are sometimes necessary, in a manner which does not grieve the Holy Spirit.

Williams left this scene of strife in 1735, moving to Llwyn-Ilwyd, near Hay on Wye, where there was a Dissenting Academy, then presided over by Vavasor Griffiths. It had been founded in Carmarthen, but had moved from to prevent the students from getting into trouble in the town, and due to fears that the church there had been corrupted by the heretical teaching of Thomas Perrot, a former principal who has been called 'the father of Arminianism in Wales.'⁹

6. Jones & Morgan, *Fathers*, p.234.

7. D. E. Jenkins, *Thomas Charles of Bala* (Denbigh, 1908), vol. 2, p.79.

8. Jones & Morgan, *Fathers*, p.218.

9. Emyr Roberts (ed. John Aaron & John Emyr), *Revival in Wales: Addresses to the Bala Ministers' Conference* (Bridgend, 2014), pp.93-4; D. Elwyn Davies, *'They Thought for Themselves': A Brief Look at the History of Unitarianism in Wales and the Tradition of Liberal Religion* (Llandysul, 1962), p.33.

Although the academies had initially been intended to prepare men for the ministry, they provided a general higher education for the sons of nonconformists, who were at this time shut out from the great universities. Williams was studying to become a doctor, perhaps influenced by the example of the famous line of physicians from Myddfai, a few miles on the other side of Llandovery.¹⁰ The curriculum at Llwyn-llwyd was taxing; although he was studying for a medical, rather than ministerial career, Williams was expected to study theology, the Classics, Greek, Latin and Hebrew, in addition to mathematics. He became proficient in the English language also, for the instruction at Llwyn-llwyd was in English, rather than his native Welsh. Whilst here, Williams would most likely have worshipped at the simple Independent chapel at Maesyronnen, converted out of a cowshed, and still used for worship today. William was an apt and disciplined student, confining himself to his studies, and indifferent as to the state of his soul, content that he was among the ranks of the orthodox. In his elegy for Howell Harris, Williams described the state of Wales at this time as being one of spiritual slumber for the established church and nonconformity alike. Although he had been raised in a large and active chapel community, he saw that the love of many had grown cold, in part through the influx of rationalism and pride.¹¹ Formality, rather than real religion, was the order of the day, mere outward morality sought after, rather than Christ.

Called by Grace

William Williams' whole life was changed one day in 1738 as he walked back to his lodgings through the town of Talgarth. His attention was drawn to the spectacle of a young man standing in the churchyard, speaking to the people about their state as sinners, the Lord Jesus Christ's holy life and atoning death, and exhorting them to flee to Christ from the wrath to come. The heart of the careless student was touched; he was drawn to listen, and the Holy Spirit breathed new life into him. Looking back on that life-changing

10. The last of these physicians died in 1739.

11. E. Wyn James, "'The New Birth of a People': Welsh Language and Identity and the Welsh Methodists, c.1740-1820", in Robert Pope (ed.), *Religion and National Identity in Wales and Scotland 1700-2000* (Cardiff, 2001), pp.17-18.

moment, Williams sang:

O soul! what preparations, what thought, what clear intent,
Dwelt in you on that morning, when heaven's call was sent?
That unexpected moment my foolish heart was drawn,
By unexpected measures, my very life reborn.

'Twas God's decree in action, His pure and holy plan,
All unbeknown, drew near me, His grace towards me ran;¹²

William Williams found fulfilled in his own experience the words of the prophet: 'I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not.'¹³ Listening to Harris describe the corruption of the human heart, Williams was led to see that he was a sinner, and that the cold orthodoxy with which he had hitherto been content could not reconcile him to a holy God. It was not enough to be a deacon's son and a morally upright young man. He was a sinner, lost and ruined in the fall.

Awakened from his complacency and shown that his all his imagined righteousnesses were as filthy rags in the sight of a holy God, Williams returned again and again to the preaching of this man.¹⁴ The man was Howell Harris, a schoolmaster from a respected local family, who, three years earlier, had undergone a dramatic conversion and begun to exhort his neighbours, to the scandal of the Church of England, which would not accept the idea of an unordained man preaching, and the glory of God, who owned Harris' work even as clergy and squires disowned him. In due time Williams was released from bondage under the law and set at gospel liberty. Of this, he wrote:

I'll not forget the place, the spot,
Where wine was poured into my impotent soul
In endless torrents, from yonder heaven,

12. Translation given in Jones & Morgan, *Fathers*, p.223.

13. Jones & Morgan, *Fathers*, p.224.

14. Derec Llwyd Morgan. *The Great Awakening in Wales* (London, 1988), p.5.

Until my wound was healed, my terror was subdued.¹⁵

With Joseph Hart, Williams henceforth saw that:
True religion's more than notion,
Something must be known and felt.

Call to the ministry

Williams set aside all thought of a medical career; he now desired, more than anything else, to show fellow sinners their lost estate and make Christ known to them. The unsettled state of the Llandovery nonconformists, and Howell Harris's attachment to the Church of England led Williams to throw in his lot with the Established Church. He ignored the fact that the followers of the revival, the Methodists, as they were generally called, were despised by many within the Church; when a mighty preacher like Daniel Rowland, curate of Llangeitho, was found among their number, Williams seems to have thought, surely there was a great deal of good in the Church? In 1740, he was ordained deacon by the Bishop of St. David's. As the son of a leading nonconformist, Williams' decision to conform seemed to represent the advance of Anglicanism in Wales. He was instituted as curate of Llanwrtyd and Dewi Abergwesin, with a stipend of ten pounds a year (equivalent to £1300 today). His preaching was blessed, Howell Harris rejoicing at the power Williams displayed in the pulpit.¹⁶ George Whitefield heard Williams preach at this time, and confessed 'I feel a sweet union to brother Williams.'¹⁷ However, Williams could not confine his activities to a small area, and soon ventured beyond the bounds of his curacies, to the fury of local clergy, and to his own superior, Theophilus Evans, an enemy of religious 'enthusiasm.' There were repeats of the sorry scenes at Cefnarthfen, as Evans thundered forth denunciations of the Methodists as false teachers and fanatics from

15. Quoted in I. R. Broome, *Some Welsh Ministers: From Howell Harris to Christmas Evans* (Harpenden, 2012), p.47. Although Broome suggests that this relates to Williams' first hearing, it is more likely to refer to the Lord's setting Williams' soul at liberty under Harris' ministry.

16. Emyr Roberts (ed. John Aaron & John Emyr), *Revival in Wales*, pp.99-100.

17. R. Brinley Jones (ed.), *Songs of Praises: English Hymns and Elegies of William Williams Pantycelyn 1717-1791* (Felinfach, 1991), p.29.

the pulpit where Williams at other times spoke of the need for grace and the new birth.¹⁸

In 1744, Williams was summoned before the Bishop to answer for his neglect of ecclesiastical propriety. The charges were not confined to Williams' preaching outside his parishes, but included allegations that he did not make the sign of the cross in baptism, and frequently omitted parts of the liturgy in his ministrations, signs that his nonconformity still clung to him.¹⁹ Seeing that he would be convicted, Williams decided that discretion was the better part of valour, and resigned his curacies before he could be dismissed. He was never advanced to priest's orders, and in consequence was not allowed to administer communion. Yet his gifts were so manifest among the Methodists that the young curate was sought after as a preacher and counsellor. In 1743, at the Calvinistic Methodist Association, held at Watford, near Caerphilly, Williams had been appointed assistant to Daniel Rowland, later becoming the superintendent of the Methodist societies in Brecon and Radnor. This was no mere title; Williams was constant in his visitation, and tireless in his travels – it has been estimated that in the course of his lifetime, he travelled over a hundred thousand miles!²⁰

It was during this period that a number of the early Methodists, including Williams, met together at Llanddeusant in Carmarthenshire to discuss means of spreading the gospel. The subject of hymns and spiritual poetry was touched upon, and the members of the meeting agreed to adjourn, compose some verses on suitable subjects, then meet to weigh and consider them. At this second meeting it was decided that William Williams had been given the gift of poetry.²¹ It seems that Williams had, early in his spiritual walk, begun to mediate in verse upon his state and pathway, and upon the glories of God, for notebooks dating from just a little after

18. Morgan, *Great Awakening*, p.86.

19. William Williams, *Welsh Calvinistic Methodism* (London, 1872, second edition, Bridgend, 1998), p.63.

20. Jones & Morgan, *Fathers*, p.231.

21. Jones & Morgan, *Fathers*, p.230.

his conversion exist outlining his walk and state in poetry. This gift was not forced; there were times when he would put a scripture passage into verse in the pulpit, or compose an apt verse on the spot.²² His longer works, such as *Theomemphus* and the *View of the Kingdom* were, however, the product of long reflection and extensive reading.

Marriage and Ministry

William Williams moved to the farmhouse at Pantycelyn, by whose name he is generally known, soon after his marriage in or around 1747. His bride, Mary Francis, had stayed in the household of Griffith Jones, the evangelical curate of Llanddowror, one of the foremost educationalists of his age. A choice saint, Mary proved an excellent companion for Williams in his ministry. She excelled in singing, and was able to help her husband with his compositions. On one occasion, when travelling with him on a preaching tour, Mary was able to calm a furious crowd by singing one of her husband's hymns. On another occasion, she was pitched into the sea by a trap set for her and her husband, and had to be rescued from drowning.²³ They frequently travelled together, Williams relying on his wife to care for him, and supply paper and pen when he was moved to write. In contrast to the experience of many of the Methodist leaders, theirs was a happy marriage. Mary presented him with two sons and five daughters. Both of their sons became ministers, his younger son, John, was principal at the Countess of Huntingdon's college at Trefecca, and translated many of his father's hymns into English, whilst his eldest son, William, was a curate in Cornwall for many years. On the death of her father, the family farm fell to Mary Williams, and thus to her husband, further increasing his property. Although identified with the Methodists, then part of the Church of England, Williams did not forget the church in which he had been raised, selling a plot of land to the seceders from Cefnarthen, so that they could erect a meeting-house of their own.²⁴

22. Jones & Morgan, *Fathers*, p.239.

23. Jones & Morgan, *Fathers*, p.246.

24. By way of thanks, this meeting house now sports two stained-glass windows depicting Williams.

Williams was indefatigable in his labours, by pen and in preaching. He provided the hymns and the theology of the revival, putting it into words which the people could sing, without diluting that content. Did he, as he worked in this way, think back to Rhys Pritchard, a former godly vicar of Llandovery, who had rendered gospel teaching into verses which the people of the town could understand?²⁵ This was no facile work; Williams Pantycelyn possessed an excellent library, containing over a hundred books, among them the works of such choice divines as John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, John Gill, and James Hervey,²⁶ whilst his writings indicated a knowledge of recent philosophy and science. John Bunyan was a frequent source of reference; like the Bedford tinker, Williams saw himself as a pilgrim, bound for Zion. The library at Pantycelyn revealed worlds far beyond Wales; with its aid, Williams produced a long poem on the religions of the world, comparing them with the pure and spiritual revealed religion of Christ and finding them all wanting, together with the mere natural theology of many so-called Christian ministers of his day and age.²⁷ The amount of research which must have been needed for this work, for which Williams sought out the most recent authors on the subject, shows his concern that the converts of the revival should be well-grounded in the faith and able to give to others a reason for the hope which was in them.²⁸ Yet Williams never forgot the lesson which he had learned on that never-to-be-forgotten day when he had heard Harris in the churchyard at Talgarth: that knowledge, however orthodox, cannot save a soul. His purpose in examining all religions was to show the need for God's free grace to lead a soul out of darkness into God's marvellous light, and:

"To show that only an inward experience of Gospel truth is sufficient to oppose, in the midst of flood and flame, the conflicts with the flesh, the world, and the devil; that all the reasons that scholars

25. R. R. Williams, *Flames from the Altar: Harris and His Contemporaries* (Caernarfon, 1962), p.44.

26. William Williams to Thomas Charles, 1 January 1791, reproduced in D. E. Jenkins, *Thomas Charles of Bala* (Denbigh, 1908), vol. 2, p.52.

27. Jones & Morgan, *Fathers*, p.237; Roberts, *Revival*, p.95.

28. Evans, *Bread of Heaven*, pp.163-7.

around the world have produced to prove that Christ is the true Messiah are not adequate to support the soul in the day of adversity or to lean upon amidst the flames.²⁹

William Williams was pre-eminently an experimental preacher and teacher, dealing with the deep things of God and the state of the souls of the Lord's living family. Having laid aside thoughts of a medical career when the gospel of Jesus Christ gripped his formerly careless heart, William Williams, Pantycelyn, became a skilled physician of souls. He served as a counsellor to many, and, through his writings, reached a far wider constituency than any of the other early Methodist leaders. Although Harris brought the *seiat* or experience-meeting to Wales, it was Williams who provided the early Methodists with a defence of these meetings on scriptural grounds, and a guide to how they were to be conducted, in the form of eleven dialogues. Here we find a short history of the work of the Holy Spirit in reviving real religion, and the value of the experience meeting in edifying and preserving Christians. He defended the revivals with which Wales was favoured during his lifetime against accusations of 'enthusiasm' and immorality, providing converts not only with comfort and edification, but with practical theology from which they could answer the slanders of the ignorant.³⁰ Williams also produced a practical guide for married couples, which fell out of favour during the Victorian era, when its frank yet spiritual honesty was erroneously taken for immodesty, meaning that the book is not included in the nineteenth century editions of Pantycelyn's works.³¹ These works led Martyn Lloyd-Jones to describe Williams as 'the outstanding and recognised leader and authority' in respect of the work of counselling and building up the Methodist societies and their members.³²

29. Quoted in and translated by Evans, *Bread of Heaven*, pp.166-7

30. David Ceri Jones, Erin Many White & Boyd Stanley Schlenker, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales 1735-1811* (Cardiff, 2012), pp.125-8.

31. Iestyn Roberts, *William Williams Pantycelyn* (Llandysul, 2004), pp.16-17; Roberts, *Revival*, p.108.

32. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, 'Introduction', in William Williams (trans. Bethan Lloyd-Jones), *The Experience Meeting* (Vancouver, 1995), p.6.

Where Harris was the outstanding evangelist of the revival, and Daniel Rowland was scarcely behind him in fervour, although more attached to a single place, as curate of Llangeitho, Williams built on their works and gave the revival depth through providing the converts with hymns and with instruction, guarding them against being led astray by the errors which abounded on every hand, or by their own emotions. His God-given understanding of the hearts and emotions led John Gwilym Jones to describe Pantycelyn as a prototype for modern psychiatry.³³

Yet Williams wrote not for the glory of man, medical knowledge, or to give later Welsh writers material for their novels, but to show forth the glory of God and to guide Zion's pilgrims in the right way. Derec Llwyd Morgan observed: 'There was no other Methodist author to compare with him in the richness and depth of knowledge of the new life in Christ which he displayed in his writings.'³⁴ Newly-married couples might benefit by reading his book on the married state, whilst the perplexed would be comforted by reading his accounts of the struggles of the grace-taught soul, and those who wondered whether the multiplicity of religions in the world overthrew the claims of Christ could find a ready guide among Pantycelyn's works. And why was this? It was because God, by his grace, led the poet-preacher in this path and gave him grace day by day. Having himself tasted of the fountain of grace, William Williams, Pantycelyn, could speak of its sweetness from his own experience.

Williams' books (together with packets of tea) were sold among the societies, augmenting the preacher's income. This, combined with the profits of his farms in Carmarthenshire, meant that Williams was able to preach without payment, relieving the Lord's poor and afflicted people.

33. Roberts, *William Williams*, p.19.

34. Morgan, *Great Awakening*, p.87.

Perhaps because of his writing ministry, later generations came to believe that Williams Pantycelyn was but an average preacher, and his gifts were largely literary. Howell Harris and Thomas Charles both stated that this was very far from the case, and Williams could preach with power when moved by the Holy Spirit.³⁵ His preaching was searching and powerful under these conditions, although his great reliance on the power of the Holy Ghost may account for later stories of his weakness as a preacher, for such men can not only preach sermons of great power and unction, but deliver addresses below the average level. Certainly, his early preaching was not always marked by the same power which attended the sermons of Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland. As Williams matured, however, he became one of the most powerful and perceptive preachers of the revival, his theological studies lending doctrinal weight and depth to his sermons.³⁶ It is to Thomas Charles we owe a description of Williams as a mature preacher:

"His oratorical powers were great, his sermons evangelical, experimental and sweet; searching and examining false teachings and experiences and discriminating in detail between false and true spirits. His imagination was strong, his eyes sharp and piercing, and heaven's influences lay heavily upon his spirit when ministering publicly and when conversing with men in the private meetings on the state of their souls."³⁷

In company, Williams displayed a lively wit, but this was not deployed in the pulpit, where the solemnity of the preacher's work rested heavily upon him.³⁸ There was power in his words when he spoke as the Spirit moved him, so that Harris wrote of jumping and dancing for joy when he heard of the effect which Williams' preaching had on his hearers.³⁹ 'His sermons,' wrote Elvet Lewis,

35. D. E. Jenkins, *Thomas Charles of Bala* (Denbigh, 1908), vol. 2, p.58; Roberts, *Revival*, p.100.

36. Morgan, *Great Awakening*, pp.85-7.

37. Quoted in Jones & Morgan, *Fathers*, p.232.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Roberts, *Revival*, p.100.

‘like his hymns, were expressions of profound experience’, containing much to comfort God’s tried family, as Williams spoke of how the Lord had met with him, and still guided him, a poor pilgrim, through the wilderness of this world, refreshing him day by day with streams of living waters from the fountain opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.⁴⁰

Although one of the most prominent men used by God in the Welsh revivals of the eighteenth century, Williams was content with the position and the things which he had received of God, in contrast to Daniel Rowland and Howell Harris, who at times clashed over who ought to be acknowledged as the leading man among the Welsh Methodists. Matters came to a head in 1750, when Rowland and Harris divided, a split caused by accusations that Harris held and propagated the erroneous teaching that God the Father suffered with Christ on the cross, and Harris’ counter-claims that Rowland’s preaching was in the letter, rather than the Spirit.⁴¹ Added to this was Harris’ fascination with Madam Sidney Griffiths, an aristocratic lady credited by Harris with the gift of prophecy, which, whatever the physical relationship between the two may have been, became too close for propriety.⁴² The spirit of faction having entered Welsh Methodism, the movement split between ‘Harris’ people’ and ‘Rowland’s People’. The power of the revival ebbed, and Harris retreated to his family home at Trefecca, where he founded a community after the fashion of the Moravians. There he might have remained, apart from a foray into England at the head of a company of men from the community as a captain in the militia,⁴³ had not Williams, following the outbreak of a new revival in 1762, approached Harris and asked him to come out of isolation to preach

40. Lewis, *Sweet Singers of Wales*, p.33.

41. Geraint Tudur, *Howell Harris: From Conversion to Separation 1735-1750* (Cardiff, 2000), p.181; Eifion Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp.273-5.

42. Evans, *Daniel Rowland*, pp.177-8.

43. Where, incidentally, he was instrumental in reviving vital religion in Great Yarmouth (Arthur Patterson, *From Hayloft to Temple: The Story of Primitive Methodism in Yarmouth* (London, 1903), pp.5-8).

the gospel once more.⁴⁴

Having written to Harris, Williams spoke also with Rowland, and was able to mend the breach between the two men. Williams was probably the only man who could have brought this about; his willingness to occupy a subordinate place, despite his talents and prominent place within Methodism, made him ideal for this task. Not only could he speak of the need for mutual submission, but he showed that humble spirit in his own life and walk.

The revival of 1762 may have broken out at Llangeitho, but it was given impetus by the works of William Williams, in particular the publication of a new collection of hymns, which fanned the embers of revival to a new pitch.⁴⁵ This seemed to vindicate Williams' view that the history of the church was marked by cycles of revival and declension.⁴⁶ In his work on *The Experience Meeting*, Williams described just such a heavenly refreshing:

"One time, there were just a few of us, professing believers, gathered together, cold and unbelievably dead, in a meeting which we called a special service, so discouraged as to doubt whether we should ever meet again.... But it is when man reaches the lowest depths of unbelief that God imparts faith, and when man has failed, then God reveals himself. So here, with us in such dire straits, on the brink of despair, with the door shut on every hope of success, God himself entered into our midst, and the light of day from on high dawned upon us; for one of the brethren – yes, the most timid of us all, the one who was strongest in his belief that God would never visit us – while in prayer, was stirred in his spirit and laid powerfully upon heaven, as one who would never let go."⁴⁷

The smoking flax of the church was not quenched, but raised to a

44. Broome, *Welsh Ministers*, pp.53-4.

45. Broome, *Welsh Ministers*, p.55.

46. Jones, White & Schlenther, *Elect Methodists*, pp.125-6; Evans, *Bread of Heaven*, p.173.

47. William Williams (trans. Bethan Lloyd-Jones), *The Experience Meeting* (Vancouver, 1995), pp.8-9.

flame by breezes from heaven, and Williams' hymns resounded throughout the meetings of the Lord's people once more. His new hymnbook went through five editions, as the work of the Lord prospered.⁴⁸ Williams did not confine his labours to literature, but he still travelled widely throughout the land, preaching wherever a door was opened. Although much of his work took place in the rural counties of south-west and mid Wales, he visited Glamorgan and the north on occasion, enduring persecution.

Williams emerged, too, as a vital counsellor to the rising generation of Welsh Methodists, ensuring that the movement was not drawn into error or frigid orthodoxy. He had not forgotten the lessons of his early days; that although orthodoxy is necessary, it is not enough. As a young man he had possessed much knowledge, and, as the son of the leader of the orthodox party at Cefnarthfen was right enough in the head, but with all this, still a child of wrath. God had to open his eyes to his lost estate, and lead him to the Lord the Lamb. He had learned, by means of Harris' preaching that never to be forgotten day at Talgarth, that:

A form of words, though e'er so sound,
Can never save a soul;
The Holy Ghost must give the wound,
And make the wounded whole. (Hart.)

Now, he sought to guide the movement's next generation to see the same, becoming a trusted counsellor of Thomas Charles of Bala, the outstanding man among the younger leaders. His discernment was brought to bear on those who would survive him, Williams taking care that plausible rogues were not permitted to hold high positions, although his love for Daniel Rowland blinded him to the arrogance and high-handed behaviour of Nathaniel, Rowland's son, whom he counselled to be a father and leader of the societies in his elegy to Daniel Rowland, little imagining that Nathaniel would take this as a licence to behave as though he was a monarch, rather than a humble under-shepherd.⁴⁹

48. Broome, *Welsh Ministers*, p.55.

49. Jenkins, *Thomas Charles*, p.72.

The mention of Williams' elegy to Daniel Rowland is a reminder that the preacher and poet of Pantycelyn was the last of the first generation Methodist leaders to die. Harris passed to his eternal reward in 1773, worn out by his exertions for Christ, and Rowland in 1790, Williams mourning their passing in verse. He was increasingly worn out also, his nerves began to give way completely, so that he was afraid to venture out of doors at night. Nevertheless, the goodness of God to Williams continued; as his life drew to a close the new vicar of Llandovery asked the aged Methodist to preach occasionally at the church of Llanfair-ar-y-bryn. In May of 1790, he felt death near at hand, counselling Thomas Charles to pray that he might be given dying grace in a dying hour.⁵⁰ By the close of 1790, Williams was confined to his home at Pantycelyn by illness. His final letter to Thomas Charles breathes disappointment, yet it is leavened by the spirit of faith, and a humble trust in the Lord in his circumstances breathes through it. He confided to Charles:

"You will understand that though I am somewhat better as regards the pain from which I have suffered, I am still but weak and feeble, and very helpless; and I have but little hope that I will ever be able to go out much, if at all, again; because I am seventy three years of age. Think what a disappointment it must be to a man who has travelled nearly three thousand miles every year for over 50 years to be now without moving more than 40 feet a day – from the fireside to bed. This is how my God wishes to deal with me, and it is well."⁵¹

By the time this letter reached Thomas Charles, its author had gone to meet with the God he had so loved and sung of. On 11 January, 1791, as he was seated in his armchair whilst his bed was made, William Williams, Pantycelyn breathed his last, and his spirit returned to God who made it, being borne up to the presence of God.⁵² Williams' prayer, which so many have sung, had been answered in his quiet, confident death:

50. Jenkins, *Thomas Charles*, p.70.

51. William Williams to Thomas Charles, 1 January 1791, in Jenkins, *Thomas Charles*, vol. 2, p.53.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of deaths and hell's destruction,
Land me safe of Canaan's side;
Songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee.

Williams was laid to rest in the churchyard of Llanfair-ar-y-bryn. A large red granite obelisk was reared over his grave, his son wrote the English-language epitaph, declaring that it is here, in a still-quiet country churchyard, 'he awaits the coming of the Morning Star which shall usher in the glories of the first resurrection.' Below this, in Welsh, is a stanza from the epitaph composed by the central character in Pantycelyn's great work *Theomemphus*, speaking of the joy of the saints in glory:

No darts, no frights, no fears, no sorrow and no pain,
Sounding forth the glory of the Lamb that once was slain;
One of a throng of myriads who sing with endless praise,
A love-song as the anthem, a song they'll ever raise.⁵³

The work and witness of William Williams did not end with his death in 1791; his work as the revival's chief author assured the poet a place in the memory and affections of many in Wales and beyond. Pantycelyn is still inhabited by his descendants, and the visitors' book contains names of people from all over the world. Statues have been erected to the poet (including one in Cardiff City Hall), and Llandoverly itself contains a beautiful memorial chapel, recently re-opened for worship and witness. However, the chief memorial to William Williams, Pantycelyn, is to be found in his hymns, which still appear in numerous hymnbooks, especially in Wales, and are loved wherever sound, experimental religion is cherished. 'He being dead yet speaketh.'

53. Eifion Evans, *Pursued by God: A Selective Translation with notes of the Welsh Religious classic Theomemphus by William Williams of Pantycelyn* (Bridgend, 1996), p.179.

We Have an Altar
Extracts from a sermon on Hebrews 13:10 by John
Lightfoot (Westminster Divine)

I will speak, at present, of the absolute necessity of faith, for the obtaining eternal life; and, therefore, have I chosen these words, which I have read to you, which seem, at first sight, to be mere strangers to such a subject; but, when explained and rightly understood, are very pertinent to such a matter. I say, 'rightly understood;' for there are many, the Popish expositors especially, that understand them exceedingly wrong, and as far from the apostle's meaning, as likely can be.

By "we have an altar," they understand the altar in their churches, that is to say the table where they administer the sacrament, and thence they call the sacrament, "the sacrament of the altar:" -a title that hath been too common in England, and which hath cost many a good man very dear:- the Lord grant, the title be never known here any more! But the title of the altar is commonly known among us still; and ask many why they call it an altar, they will be ready to produce this place of the apostle, "we have an altar." - As if the apostle -who had been crying down the service and sacrifices of the altar all along this Epistle, and showed that they were but shadows, and to vanish when the substance appeared, should set them up again; and build up anew, what he had so earnestly set himself to destroy. As if Gideon, that destroyed the altar of Baal in the night, should fall a-work in the morning, and build it up again.

But the 'altar' in the apostle's meaning here, is Christ himself. And, as he had called him a 'high-priest,' and a 'sacrifice,' along in the Epistle before, so he calls him, also, the 'altar' here; showing, that all those things did but represent *him*, and that *he* was the substance and reality of those shadows. He shows, how he was the great high priest, in the latter end of the fourth; and along the fifth, chapter. He

shows, how he was the great sacrifice, in the ninth and tenth chapters; and how he was the great altar, he shows at this place, "we have an altar."

And that he means Christ by the 'altar' is apparent by two things, that follow,- to omit more, that might be collected by the context.

The first is, in the words immediately following, 'For those beasts, whose blood was brought by the high priest into the holy place for sin, their bodies were burnt without the camp. Therefore, Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.' His argumentation is this: "The great solemn sacrifice for sin) on the day of atonement, was not burnt upon the altar in the temple, but was burnt without the city; so Christ was sacrificed 'without the gate;' so that, whosoever will partake of that true sacrifice for sin, must go to the altar there, and not to the altar within the temple."

And, in the next verse but one, he shows yet more plainly, that he means Christ by our altar, verse 15; "Therefore, by him, let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually to God." As, on the altar in the temple, they offered their sacrifices and thank-offerings, so by him, as on our altar, let us offer our sacrifice of praise to God.

So that, in the words, "We have an altar," you have an affirmative assertion, and a negative. The affirmative, that we have Christ for our altar: the negative, that they that serve the tabernacle have no right to eat of this altar. The affirmative, comfortable to every true Christian; the latter seems comfortless for every true Jew. The reason of the negative assertion we may inquire more particularly into afterward. To the former to speak at present, we take up this observation from it:

That he that will offer any sacrifice acceptable to God, must go to Christ as the true altar, on which to offer it. No sacrifice among the Israelites could be accepted, if it were not offered on the temple altar. And it was God's special command, "Thou shalt not

offer thy sacrifice in any of thy cities, but shalt go to the altar of the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose."

Nor can any sacrifice be acceptable to God of any Christian, but what is offered to him upon the altar of his appointment, the Lord Christ, where alone is atonement for sinners. As priesthood and sacrifice were typical, and signified to this purpose, so, also, was the altar of the same signification. And whereas there were two altars at the temple, one for sacrifice the other for incense, they did both but represent Christ and his acting in his two great works, - viz. his offering himself a sacrifice by his death, and his offering the continual incense of his mediation. And how methodically did the representation proceed suitable to the reality? For, first, the priest offered the sacrifice upon the altar, and then went in within the tabernacle, and offered incense: so Christ first offered himself at his death, and then went into the highest heaven to make intercession.

The Papists, in their mass, take upon them to offer Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice for quick and dead: so they are the altar, and Christ is the offering. But we learn better, to make Christ the altar, and we ourselves and our services, the offering offered upon it.

None can come to God to find acceptance with him, but he must first give himself into the hand of Christ, to bring him to God for acceptance. The apostle tells us, that all acceptance is in the beloved, and to be expected no other way, Ephesians 1:6. This is the great mystery of the gospel: for the want of which duly owned, Muslims and Jews are at loss, and are lost from God for ever. They both pretend for religion, pretend for heaven; but they both miss the door, by which alone they are to enter; and so they are excluded eternally, missing of Christ, by whom only we come there.

Our Saviour, indeed, speaks of entering and getting into the sheepfold, some other way than at the door; but he saith, they are "thieves and robbers." His meaning is of false teachers, that can find a way to creep into the sheepfold, the church, to seduce and destroy the sheep, some other way than at the right door. But whosoever

But whosoever will get either into heaven, or, indeed, into the true and sincere religion that leadeth thither, must enter by Christ, the door; or he will never come there.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life; none can come to the Father but by me." Consider of that, "I am so the way, that none can come to the Father but by me." Then sure the Papists are out of the way, as well as Muslims and Jews, when they think to come to God by the mediation of saints and angels. "None can come to God but by me," saith our Saviour: 'But I can come to God (saith a Papist) by the Virgin Mary, by Peter, Paul, and the mediation of other saints in heaven.' Certainly, they must have some subtle distinction here, or they contradict Christ to his face, and take his honour, and give it to another.

Hebrews 7:25: "Christ, having an unfailing priesthood, is able to save to the uttermost those that come to God by him." If you come to God, you must come by him; and that only is the way to be saved. But if you expect to come to God by any other means whatsoever; you are out of the way and will be lost. "Christ suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." If there were any other way to come to God than by Christ, the death of Christ was but to little purpose, and our believing in him to as little, and we may justly say with the Apostle, "Our preaching is in vain, and your faith is also vain!"

It is said of Christ, that " he is a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Though he died and offered himself the great sacrifice for sinners,-yet he is a priest for ever, still offering sacrifice to God; but no more himself, but his people's sacrifice. And that offering is twofold, viz. offering the persons of his people to God, as an acceptable living sacrifice, and offering their services, as an acceptable spiritual sacrifice to God. Of the former you have testimony from his own words, Isaiah 8:18: "Behold, I and the children, which the Lord hath given me:" of the latter, Revelation 8:3, where you read of his "offering the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar, which was before the throne.'

What the manner of Christ's mediation is, is too curious to inquire after; but what the matter of his mediation is, these two things make evident, Viz. his Presenting his people to God's acceptance; and his presenting their services to the like acceptance. For what acceptance can any soul under heaven find upon his own account? What can a man do towards his own justification before God? "I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee?" A very pertinent question. A man is so little able to find acceptance with God of himself, that he may rather stand amazed, that ever sinful men do find acceptance. The apostle accounts it not an ordinary thing, to "Comprehend, with all saints, the breadth and length, and depth and height, of this mystery."

Before Christ, a mediator, was set up, imagine how Adam could deal with God to find acceptance with him, after he was now become sinful Adam. Nay, it is not easy to conceive, how he dealt with God, even while innocent. For, certainly, it was his duty to pray in his innocency, thereby to show his dependence on God; but upon what interest to pray, when he had no mediator, is something difficult to apprehend. But after he was fallen, and Christ not yet promised, those three hours that he lay in darkness before the promise of Christ came to him [Lightfoot is here referencing a Rabbinic tradition], how could he then pray to God? and upon what account beg his pardon? But I need not use many words to show the need of Christ, a mediator.

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

- 1 John 2:1-2.

But since my Savior stands between
In garments dyed in blood
'Tis He instead of me is seen
When I approach to God
(John Newton)

The Great Heresies - 5

Nestorianism and Eutychianism

We have made these studies of the so-called Great Heresies because they represent significant false steps in the history of Christian teaching; in each of them a true teaching is distorted, and so becomes false. Each precipitated a crisis that forced the Church to look deeper into the Scriptures and consider the fullness of God's revelation there; the heretics took a part for the whole and so, in practice, discarded other parts, the orthodox took the whole.

Our previous study, that of Apollinarius, marks a move from the question of the deity of Christ to that of the relationship between the Divine and human in Christ. Opposing the ruinous heresy of Arianism, Apollinarius took a crude approach, teaching that the Divine replaced a part of the human nature, a position that was rightly condemned on the ground that it made the Incarnate Christ less than human. The next great theological controversy would be driven at least as much by politics as theology, and ended in the great Council of Chalcedon. The two men who gave their names to the heresies condemned there were Nestorius and Eutyches, and they came from Antioch and Alexandria respectively.

History

After the Council of Constantinople in 381, theologians in the Eastern Church continued to debate the questions that had been raised by the Arian controversy, and consider how best to keep from falling into error on the question of the person of Christ. Broadly speaking there were two main approaches, characterising schools of thought based in Alexandria and Syrian Antioch respectively. The Alexandrians laid great stress on the unity of Christ's person, while the Antiochenes stressed the two natures and the true humanity of Christ. The different emphases were not too much of a problem so long as they were only emphases, but there was always a danger of

losing proportion; the Alexandrian emphasis could too easily result in a view of Christ that down-played his humanity, while the Antiochene approach might lead to a view of Christ that divided the two natures rather than just distinguishing them. Not only that, but there was a risk that the two schools might mistake a difference in emphasis in one another for outright heresy.

This is what actually happened in the Nestorian controversy; Nestorius has perhaps the unique distinction among the “great heretics” that he almost certainly did not teach the heresy that his name has become attached to. Complicating this were political issues; the church, freed from persecution and favoured by the Caesars, had developed its own complex political system of parishes, dioceses, and provinces, bishops, archbishops, and patriarchs. The Patriarchs were archbishops of five particularly significant cities. These were Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, and Constantinople. Jerusalem was always small and rather insignificant, while Rome, away in Europe, was distant and had its own concerns. In the East, Alexandria and Antioch were political as well as academic rivals. Caught in the middle was the bishopric of Constantinople, the Imperial capital. Alexandria and Antioch both claimed that their bishoprics had been founded by Apostles; no such claim could be substantiated for Constantinople, yet the bishop of the Imperial Capital held more or less equal rank with the occupants of the two older sees. And if an Antiochene bishop sat in the *Cathedra* in the great cathedral of Hagia Sophia, Alexandria was likely to seek a reason to remove him. When Nestorius of Antioch was elevated to the bishopric of Constantinople in 428, conflict became all but inevitable.

Nestorius, born about 386, was a Syrian who trained and ministered in Antioch, trained in the theology of the Antiochene school. By this time monasticism had become widespread in the Church, and Nestorius became a monk in the monastery of Euprepus. We must not think in terms of the enclosed, secluded life of later medieval monks, for Nestorius became a popular preacher in the city, and a theological teacher. Because monks were supposed to be more devout than parish clergy, it became customary (as it still is in the

Eastern Orthodox Churches) for bishops to be selected from their ranks. Bishops were required not only to administer their dioceses, but to preach and to teach, so a monk who was a noted preacher was likely to be a candidate for any See that might fall vacant. When Patriarch Sisinnius of Constantinople died in 428, Emperor Theodosius II selected Nestorius to take his place.

Cyril of Alexandria had been elevated to the Egyptian Patriarchate in 412. While he was certainly one of the most able theologians of his age, his character was marred by a fierce, one might say fanatical, dislike of the school of Antioch, and indeed of the Patriarch of Constantinople – whoever that might happen to be. Cyril took things personally; with him there could be no cordial disagreement, to disagree with him was to be his enemy. Therefore he viewed Nestorius as his enemy, and looked for reasons to attack him.

This reason was not long in coming. As Patriarch, part of Nestorius' task was to mediate conflict in the Church of Constantinople. As the Imperial capital, the city contained presbyters from Alexandria and Antioch, as well as other areas of the Empire, and indeed beyond. He was asked to intervene in a bitter partisan dispute between two groups, one of Alexandrians who referred to the Virgin Mary as *Theotokos*, the one who gave birth to God, and another who seem to have been extreme Antiochenes, who insisted that she was merely *Anthropotokos*, one who gave birth to the human nature. Attempting, as bishops are wont to do, to bring about a compromise, Nestorius suggested that the term *Christotokos*, the one who gave birth to Christ, be used.

At this point it is important to explain what the controversy was; it was not really about Mary at all, but about Jesus. *Theotokos* is often translated into English as “Mother of God,” which term brings with it all sorts of Roman Catholic baggage about the adoration of Mary and her elevation in Romanist popular devotion to the level of almost a demi-goddess. But the debate in the 5th century was not about Mary, it was about something much more fundamental; was the person born of Mary God at his birth?

If Jesus was *not* God at his birth, it follows that he must have *become* God later on; which is the heresy known as Adoptionism. The *Anthropotokos* party, in saying that Mary simply gave birth to the human nature, at least gave the impression that the human nature of Christ existed independently from the Divine nature, which would logically lead to the conclusion that there were two persons in Christ. The *Theotokos* party, on the other hand, insisted that the union of natures in Christ was such that there is only one person, who has two natures, so that the person whom Mary carried in her womb and gave birth to is God, though she gave birth to a man. Nestorius' compromise suggestion of *Christotokos*, like most theological compromises, failed to actually address the matter at hand; both parties affirmed that Mary gave birth to Christ, they differed on the nature of the union of the two natures in Christ. "Use neither," Nestorius said. What he probably hoped for was to force an end to the debate; in fact he poured oil onto the flames.

When Cyril heard the news, he was furious. In his mind, Nestorius' refusal to use the term *Theotokos*, joined with his insistence on the word *Christotokos*, had to mean that Nestorius denied the union of the two natures in Christ. Rather than asking further questions or engaging in debate to discover whether this perception was correct, Cyril launched a blistering attack on the younger Patriarch. Nestorius divided Christ! he insisted, Nestorius teaches two Christs! The Patriarch of Alexandria wrote to Nestorius demanding that he recant his heresy, and confess that there was in Christ "one Incarnate nature of the Logos."

This further confused matters. Probably Cyril merely used the word "nature" loosely, in a way that was more or less identical to "Person." But the tone of his letter, joined with this phrase, left Nestorius with the inescapable impression that Cyril was out to get him (which was true) and that Cyril himself was a heretic (which he was not). By this letter, Cyril ensured there would be no coming to a better understanding of one another, and so began what Nestorius himself would later refer to as "the tragedy."

Cyril believed that Nestorius was teaching that Christ was two persons, a human and a Divine, joined by a merely moral and voluntary union of their wills, while Nestorius believed that Cyril was teaching that in Christ the human and Divine natures are mixed up so as to form a single composite nature. On this basis, each condemned the other as heretical. As the historian G.L. Prestige has put it, "Never have two theologians more completely misunderstood one another's meaning."¹ The result was catastrophic.

The disagreement between the two sides can hardly be called a debate; they were talking past each other and hurling insults. Had it merely been an academic quarrel in some university or college, it would have been bad enough, but it swiftly became political. Cyril had the ear of the Emperor, and in 431 Theodosius II called the Council of Ephesus to try to settle the matter. It was a disgrace; Cyril made sure to open the Council before the Antiochenes had arrived, and not surprisingly the Council condemned Nestorius as a heretic on Cyril's misunderstanding of his position, and deposed him from the Patriarchate. On their arrival, the Antiochenes held their own Council, and of course condemned and deposed Cyril. The two rival councils then appealed to Theodosius, who found in favour of Cyril's Council and upheld Nestorius' deposition, branding him a heretic without the benefit of a fair hearing.

The Council of Ephesus was not merely a disgraceful farce; it not only addressed the Nestorian debate, but also condemned the Pelagian heresy, and for that we should be thankful. However, its handling of Nestorius was nothing short of scandalous. The result, predictably, was that the question was not actually settled at all, and the theological conflict between the two cities continued.

After Ephesus

Given the disgraceful way in which Nestorius was handled at Ephesus, the debate did not die down; if anything, it became more heated. They continued to dispute, and to lobby the Emperor for justice. Like many Emperors, Theodosius wanted peace more than

1. G.L. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics* (London, SPCK, 1940) p. 127

anything else, and eventually in 433 he persuaded Cyril and John to sign a "Formula of Agreement." John and the Syrians had to accept the deposition and exile of Nestorius, and the term *Theotokos*; this they were willing to do. It helped that Maximianus, Nestorius' successor, was eager for peace, and was no violent partisan; although he supported Cyril, Maximianus urged Cyril to moderate his language in the interests of peace. For their part, Cyril and the Alexandrian party had to accept that in the one Christ there is a union of two natures. Cyril, to his credit, accepted the agreement, saying that it taught everything that he had been contending for. Others, however, called him a traitor for doing so, and continued to insist on the term "one nature." The seed had been sown for another dispute.

Eutyches

It was not long in coming. In 444, Cyril died, and the controversy broke out again in Constantinople. This time the focus was an Alexandrian, an Archimandrite (a senior Abbot) named Eutyches. Eutyches was precisely what Nestorius and his supporters had feared, a man who had taken the Alexandrian position to its extreme, so emphasising the union that in his teaching all distinction of the two natures had been lost. Eutyches taught that in Christ the human nature had been swallowed up in the Divine nature, "like a drop of wine in the sea." The Deity had absorbed the humanity, and Christ could no longer properly be spoken of as human.

This was out-and-out heresy, not a confusion of ideas; Eutyches knew what he was saying, and spoke clearly. The Patriarch Flavian opposed and publicly condemned him, removing him from office. But the political element meant that this was not the end of the matter, for Eutyches had powerful friends. Flavian was an Antiochene, and he found himself, like Nestorius, confronting a powerful and angry Patriarch of Alexandria. Cyril had been succeeded by Dioscorus, a man who had all the temper of Cyril and none of the theological insight. Dioscorus was little more than a thug in a bishop's robe, but he too had influence at court. So in 449

Theodosius summoned a second Council at Ephesus to consider whether Flavian had been right to remove Eutyches. If the first had been unfair, it was a model of impartiality compared to this second.

The Robber Synod

Just as Cyril had controlled the first Council of Ephesus, Dioscorus was the absolute master of the second. Because the Council was met to consider the legality of Flavian's deposition of Eutyches, Flavian did not take part. Had this really been in the interests of fairness, it would have been admirable, but it was not; his opponents were in absolute control of the Council, and his absence allowed them a free hand. Eutyches' accuser was not allowed to speak, and anyone who Dioscorus thought might possibly favour Flavian was silenced. Bishop Leo I of Rome had not been able to make the journey to Asia Minor, but he had sent a letter outlining his thoughts on the controversy; this was not allowed to be read because Dioscorus did not trust the Western delegates to take his side. To further ensure his control, Dioscorus brought with him a large number of Alexandrian monks to "persuade" those he was not sure of, usually by violence.

As may be imagined, the outcome of this Council was a foregone conclusion; Eutyches was reinstated, and Flavian was condemned. In an action that seems thoroughly in keeping with the nature of the Council, Flavian was assaulted by Alexandrian monks, and died of his injuries soon afterwards. He was replaced by a friend of Dioscorus named Anatolius. When he heard about the proceedings, Leo I was disgusted, and gave the council the title "The Robber Synod;" the name has stuck. Much as the decisions of this council were disliked, there was no way that they could be reversed as long as Theodosius was alive. This proved not to be very long; in 450 he was killed in a riding accident, allowing the whole issue to be reopened. Theodosius' successor, Marcian, was more favourable to Leo and the Antiochene theologians, and so he convened a fresh council at Chalcedon, near Constantinople.

The Council of Chalcedon

The Council of Chalcedon was much more balanced, largely because

Emperor Marcian was, unlike his predecessor, not a partisan of Dioscorus. A tough man who had been taken prisoner by the Vandals at one point in his career, he was not one to be intimidated, and he arranged for the majority of members of the Council to be drawn from the ranks of the moderate Alexandrians, who opposed Eutyches. These were not sure how to express the orthodox position, at first adopting an expression that in fact agreed with the Eutychians, saying that Christ was "incarnate from two natures." It was here that Leo I of Rome stepped in, insisting that such language was unacceptable; the two natures remained two after the Incarnation, though in union. The wording was changed to "in two natures," and this had the desired result of excluding Dioscorus and Eutyches, while satisfying the great majority of Bishops. Anatolius, unexpectedly, affirmed this statement, much to the annoyance of Dioscorus. He saw the way that the wind was blowing, and trimmed his sails accordingly.

The Council proceeded to issue the *Definition of Chalcedon*, also known as the Chalcedonian Creed, which states:

"Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ;

even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us."²

It will be noted that the Definition insists on both the distinction of the two natures of Christ and the union in one person. It also expresses the propriety of the word *Theotokos*, yet qualified with "according to the flesh." It simply expresses the Biblical teaching and cautions against certain errors. Chalcedon emphasises that the union is in the person of Christ, hence the common theological term used for it, the *Hypostatic Union* (*Hypostasis* being the Greek word used for "person"). Chalcedon set boundaries drawn from the Bible, and in a balanced statement, tried to bring Antioch and Alexandria together.

Chalcedon was accepted by the majority of the Church with just a few exceptions, primarily (unsurprisingly) in Syria and Egypt. Dioscorus was deposed, but his followers continued to support him, resulting in a division in the Egyptian Church between the Chalcedonians and the Dioscorian party, who were named *Monophysite* (believers in the One Nature) by their opponents.

In an odd, yet fitting postscript to this, Patriarch Anatolius of Constantinople is said to have been murdered in 458 by supporters of Dioscorus, presumably enraged that Anatolius had not supported the Eutychian party at Chalcedon. So ended the great Christological debate of the 5th century.

After Chalcedon

The ecclesiastical division that followed Chalcedon remains to this day, with the Oriental Orthodox Churches such as the Coptic and Syriac tracing their descent directly to the followers of Dioscorus. Yet theologically the modern Oriental Orthodox Churches do not teach the views of Eutyches, though some of their members have attempted, unsuccessfully, to accuse those who hold to the Chalcedonian teaching of Nestorianism; in reply, the Orthodox have

2. English translation courtesy of:<http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/chalcedon.html>

often said that the Coptic Orthodox teaching is false because it leads to actual Monophysitism. The actual theological debate, however, is over, what remains is largely political, since both Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches agree that there is a union of two natures in Christ, but express it differently.

The ancient Nestorian Churches, founded by supporters on Nestorius who refused to be reconciled to the Orthodox after Chalcedon, never taught “The Nestorian Heresy,” for Nestorius himself never did. For several centuries these churches flourished beyond the Empire, with bishops as far afield as China and India. Persecution and the rise of Islam, however, decimated these Eastern Churches, leaving only a few communities in modern-day Iraq, which have been further devastated by the recent conflicts there.

The Reformation Debate

The condemnation of Ephesus and Chalcedon meant that through the middle ages, Nestorius was regarded as a heretic who had divided Christ. With the Reformation, however, there came a desire to re-evaluate what really happened, and what he had really taught. Martin Luther was perhaps the first of many Protestant theologians to realise that Nestorius was almost certainly not a Nestorian. Since the Reformation, many historians and theologians have also concluded that Nestorius was no heretic, though Eutyches certainly was.

Actual Nestorianism (the name has stuck) and Eutychianism remain dangers in the Churches, because both are, like Apollinarianism, naive errors into which people may fall unaware, by not holding both the union and the distinction of the two natures in the one Christ. There are very few who formally hold to either, but there are probably a fair number who express themselves according to these heresies, and hold them without knowing it.

During the Reformation-era debate over the Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, the issue arose again. Followers of Martin Luther, desirous to retain a corporeal presence of Christ in the

elements, developed the doctrine of the *Communicatio Idiomatum*, the idea that the properties of Christ's Divine nature are communicated to his human nature, allowing the human nature to be in every place at the same time. The Reformed denial of this novel doctrine was interpreted by some Lutheran theologians as Nestorianism, and even today there are modern orthodox Lutherans who accuse the Reformed of Nestorianism. On the other hand, to the Reformed the Lutheran teaching appeared to come close to Eutychianism; if the properties of the Divine nature are communicated to the human nature, does that not imply that the human nature is in some sense confused with the Divine?

The Dangers

Nestorius, we have argued, was not a Nestorian, so the heresy of Nestorianism is really what Cyril mistakenly thought his opponent was teaching. Very simply it is this; that in the Incarnation there is actually no Incarnation at all. Instead there is a moral union between two persons, one a holy, upright, righteous man called Jesus, the other the eternal Son of God. These two persons are one in will and intention, but that is the sum of their union. Unlike the Biblical teaching, it is a union *of* persons, not a union *in* a person.

The implication of this for salvation is startling; it means that human salvation becomes a matter of cooperation with God, the union of our wills with the will of God. There is no actual redemption, because only a man died on the cross. Jesus is saved, but Jesus does not really save. He provides an example and a pattern, but not salvation. It becomes salvation by obedience.

Contrast this with the Scriptures, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18). For Christ is one person, with two natures. So Paul can write of the Jews in Romans 9:5, “Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.” Mary is rightly called *Theotokos* because of what is

recorded in Luke 1:35, “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” So he, who is Lord and God, is not ashamed to call men his brethren (Hebrews 2:11).

On the other hand, Eutychianism is the natural theology of the mystic. The Roman Catholic Quietists, led by Miguel de Molinos (not to be confused with the Jesuit Luis de Molina), taught a contemplative mysticism the aim of which was that the human will would be swallowed up in God's will, and the human personality extinguished. This is not Christianity, which teaches a dying *to* self, but is closer to Buddhism, a dying *of* self. The self is not saved at all in a consistent Eutychian scheme, because man cannot actually dwell with God at all – God swallows up all finite beings that come to him.

But Christianity is different. The Bible opens for us a glorious future, in the vision given to the Apostle John, “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Revelation 21:3). The distinction between God and man remains for ever, and so we can have fellowship with God.

The danger of lapsing into an unconscious Eutychianism is also very real in debate with those who outright deny the deity of Christ, or hold to a teaching that practically denies it. In facing the challenge of theological liberalism, some conservative Christians have fallen into an opposite extreme and spoken in such a way as to suggest that the divine nature in Christ swallows up the human. Here Chalcedon provides us with a useful means of retaining a proper balance that respects all the Bible says about Christ.

On the other hand, some Calvinists have fallen into the trap of refusing to acknowledge the Hypostatic Union in their speech. So we have heard the language of Charles Wesley's hymn ‘And Can it Be’ criticised for the line, “That thou, my God, should's't die for me.”

"The divine nature cannot die," the criticism goes, "therefore the line is false." No, it is not; because Christ is one person in two natures, and since the one person who is God died according to the human nature, then it is as right to speak of Christ as "the crucified God" as it is for Paul to speak of "The Lord of Glory" as having been crucified (1 Corinthians 2:8), or in Acts 20:28 to speak of "The Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." The divine nature has no blood, but since Christ is both God and man in one person, his blood is the blood of God, though entirely human blood.

To return to the term that touched off the whole argument in Constantinople; we do not have to use the term *Theotokos*; for some the word is too filled with connotations of Mariolatry and Roman error, and we should be kind to such. On the other hand, it is absolutely vital that we confess that Jesus is fully God and fully man, and one person, and that this union began at his conception. The one who was born of Mary in Bethlehem is true Almighty God, and was as much God at his birth as when he multiplied the loaves and fishes and when he died upon the cross.

Conclusion

God can bring good out of man's evil; that is certainly the case in the history that we have examined in this article. The relentless politics of the ancient Church is wearying and hard to read of, yet out of it at last came the careful, balanced, Biblical guidelines of Chalcedon.

We are once again reminded of the importance of *balance* in theology. That balance, when it comes to the Incarnation, is best preserved by remembering that it was "For us and for our salvation," that Christ was born. Fully God, he is able to save; fully man, he is able to save his people from their sins.

And man and God may dwell together without man ceasing to be; as 'Rabbi' Duncan put it, "There is a man in the glory," and this gives hope to us his people that we too may dwell with God,

O Jesus, thou hast promised
to all who follow thee,
that where thou art in glory
there shall thy servant be.
- E.J. Bode

And what a glorious hope the God-Man gives to us, the hope of life eternal and fellowship with God in him.

The Gospel Minister's Preparation

From an Ordination Sermon by Matthew Henry

From Isaiah 6:8

It is no absurdity at all, at the ordination of a Gospel minister, to borrow instruction from the mission of an evangelical prophet: for the treasure is for substance the same, which is lodged in both these earthen vessels. And though there are diversities of gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4, 11) and administrations, various degrees of light, and methods of revelation, yet in all these there works the very same Spirit of the Lord, who came upon both the Old Testament prophets, and remains with the New Testament ministry (John 14:16). In allusion to the Old Testament way of revelation, gospel preaching is called prophesying. Let us "Prophesy according to the proportion of faith" (Romans 12.6).

And the prophets are called the brethren of the gospel ministers. The angel says to John, "I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets" (Revelation 22:9). The ordinary influences and operations of the Spirit, and its plentiful effusion, in gospel times, in the prediction and promise of it is represented by the peculiar and extraordinary ways of discovery of the divine will then in use; "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters

shall prophesy" (Joel 2:28). They shall have a clear insight into the things of God, and be able to speak clearly of them to one another.

None perhaps of all the Old Testament prophets had a more awful and solemn mission than the prophet Isaiah, who spoke so plainly and fully of Christ, and the grace of the gospel. Ezekiel's mission was likewise very awful; his errand chiefly was to prove and threaten, and display the terrors of the law; but the vision that introduced his mission was more dark and mystical.

We do not dispute whether this was Isaiah's first mission; it is likely it was not, the sermons in the foregoing chapters are placed before it. He had, if I may say, prophesied for some time as a candidate, that he might first be tried, and might himself make trial of his work; in that he might be approved of God, and yet he had this solemn mission afterwards. He was sent by God before, spoke in his name, and knew that he did, but his commission was then virtual and implicit, while now it was more expressly recognised, when the work grew more upon his hands, and the difficulties and oppositions in it increased. Now this ambassador made his public entry.

When we look back on the preparations for this solemnity (which we have an account of in the preceding verses of this chapter), we shall find the prophet very deeply touched with a sense of his own sinfulness, and a comfortable sense of the pardon of sin, and of his acceptance with God. I take notice of these for instruction to you, brother, who today are dedicating yourself to the service of God in the gospel of his Son, that you may walk in the same Spirit.

The Sense of Sin

He was much affected with a sight of his own sinfulness and unworthiness. See how he cries out upon a sight of God in his glory, and hearing his holiness praised: "Woe is me, for I am undone!" (Isaiah 6:5). "I am cut off," so the word is, I deserve to be cut off from all my privileges and hopes as an Israelite; for "I am a man of unclean lips," unfit, unable to be employed in speaking for God. "I dwell," indeed "among a people of unclean lips," who deserve to be reprov'd, and have need to be reformed, but how unfit am I to be

made use of as an instrument therein, who am myself a man of unclean lips, and never saw so much of it, nor so much of the evil of it, as now that "mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

God looks upon those as fittest to be honoured by him, and employed for him, who are humble and low in their own eyes. When a soul is brought to cry out, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" it is then in a fair way to be saved for ever. As Christ, so Christians, are first humbled, and then exalted; like a corn of wheat, die first, then revive.

Pardon and Reconciliation

He was likewise impressed with a comfortable assurance of the pardon of his sin, and of his reconciliation to God. A coal from the altar was laid upon his mouth (Isaiah 6:7), not to burn it, but to purify it, to take away the uncleanness of his lips which he complained of, for the sin that truly humbles us shall not ruin us; and it was said to him, "Lo, this has touched thy lips, thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." And blessed is the man, thrice blessed is the minister, "whose iniquity is forgiven" (Psalm 32:1) and who knows it, by the witness of God's Spirit with his spirit. They who are thus sprinkled from an evil conscience, are best prepared to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14) and can come boldly to and from the throne of his grace.

None are so fit to display to others the riches of gospel grace as those who have themselves received the comfort of it. They best preach Christ crucified who have known experimentally the power of his death, and are themselves clothed with that everlasting righteousness which he brought in by it. And how feelingly may they preach repentance and remission of sins to others, who have themselves tasted the bitterness of a discovered guilt and the sweetness of a sealed pardon. And this is one reason why the ministry of reconciliation is committed to men like ourselves, who labour under the same burdens, and lie open to the same dangers, with the rest of mankind.

Book Reviews

Banner of Truth Trust

Knots Untied by J. C. Ryle. Harcover, ISBN 978-1-84871-682-7, Pp. 488. £15

J.C. Ryle (1816-1900) was one of the leading evangelicals of the 19th century. His *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* are still highly regarded today; his *Holiness* has become a classic; he wrote many other books and tracts, which are always a delight to read. Ryle was a committed Anglican; he became Bishop of Liverpool in 1880. This book, *Knots Untied*, was written a little before that in 1874, while he was Vicar of Stradbroke, in Suffolk. It is subtitled, *Being plain statements on disputed points in religion, from the standpoint of an evangelical churchman*. The Church of England at that time was assailed on two sides. On the one hand, there were the ritualists, advocating an almost Roman Catholic interpretation of the Prayer Book; on the other, there was "modernism" (Ryle calls it Neology), questioning everything. Many were leaving the Church of England, some going to Rome, others to the nonconformist churches, and the faith of many was unsettled. Against this background, Ryle defends evangelical beliefs, and contends that the Church of England is essentially evangelical, in its 39 Articles, in the intentions of the 16th century Reformers who wrote its formularies and Prayer Book, and even by law, as it stood at that time. The book is necessarily "dated", inasmuch as Ryle spoke to his own generation, but there is much that is still relevant today. Ritualism still exists, and many clergymen today would openly question fundamental Christian beliefs, though one suspects that if Ryle were alive today, he might add a few extra chapters to cover some modern trends in morality in the Church that would astonish and appall him. Some chapters may be a little tedious for non-Anglicans. His defence of infant baptism and of the words of the Prayer Book, "Seeing that this child is regenerate", for example, will probably not convince many Baptists! We should, however, at least hear his reasoning. His essays on regeneration and other basic doctrines, however, are superb, and full of Scripture, which for Ryle is always the final court of appeal. The essay on "Private Judgement" touches on a rarely-considered but important theme,

and essays on "Pharisees and Sadducees" and "Divers and Strange Doctrines" are not only wonderful expositions of Scripture, but much-needed warnings for the present day, not only for Anglicans, but for all Christians. This is a book well worth reading, and its lessons taken to heart in this 21st century just as much as in Ryle's own day.

- Robert Dale

The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit by George Smeaton. Hardcover, ISBN 9781848717046, Pp. x+389, £16

The re-issue of this classic Reformed treatise on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is most welcome indeed. In an era where so much discussion on the subject is coloured in one way or another by the Charismatic Movement, it is refreshing to read a book that comes from before that whole debate began. Smeaton was one of the early leaders of the Free Church of Scotland, and taught New Testament exegesis at New College, Edinburgh, between 1857 and his death in 1889. This volume contains an expanded version of his 1882 Cunningham Lectures delivered at New College, in which the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is presented Biblically, systematically, and historically. Smeaton gives the lie to the claim sometimes made that the older Reformed theologians had no place for the Holy Spirit in their systems; indeed, free from the pressures of modern controversy and exaggerated focus on the Spirit's work, he gives a balanced presentation that has few equals. Deep scholarship joins a warm piety in these pages, and we would commend it to all.

Bishop J.C. Ryle's Autobiography: The Early Years, ed. Andrew Atherstone. Hardcover, ISBN 978 1 84871 696 5, Pp. 359, £15.50

John Charles Ryle, born in 1816, was to become the first Bishop of Liverpool (1880 - 1900). He wrote this autobiography not for publication but for the benefit of his family. It covers the first 40 years or so of his life, showing how the Lord prepared him for his later ministry as one of the outstanding evangelical clergy of the later nineteenth century.

This carefully edited work deserves to be read by all who are concerned to see how 'God moves in a mysterious way'. We see Ryle

being educated at Eton and Oxford, carrying off various prizes, distinguishing himself on the sports field, etc., and expecting to succeed his father who was a prosperous banker. God, however, had other plans for him and he became a minister of the gospel. He became famous not so much as a preacher or a pastor, but as the author of an immense number of gospel tracts. The texts of five of these are given in this book, showing his masterly use of English in presenting the gospel, and, even more importantly, his grasp of the Biblical and evangelical message of salvation.

Warmly recommended.

- John Manton

The Mysteries of Christianity by T. J. Crawford. Hardcover, ISBN 9781848717152, Pp. 329+xviii. £15.50

Subtitled *Revealed Truths Expounded and Defended*, this is a work of Christian apologetics by a one-time Professor of Divinity in Edinburgh University (1860-1875). The fact that Crawford was one of the men who remained in the Church of Scotland at the Disruption in 1843 may explain why he is little known compared to his Free Church contemporaries, but he is well worth reading, and the republication of this book is a welcome sign.

The Mysteries of Christianity is a work of apologetics first published in 1874. Is such a book worth republishing today? Has not the apologetic task changed completely? In one sense it has changed, but in another sense it remains the same, to present the truths of Christianity and to defend the supernatural character of the Gospel. It is this task that Crawford takes up in his book, defending the supernatural character of the Bible, laying out the Biblical teachings regarding the Trinity, the Atonement, and the Incarnation. This is no light read, it is a serious book on serious subjects, but will well repay the diligent reader. Sinclair Ferguson's introduction further adds to the value of this work that might well be referred to as unearthed treasure.

Might we suggest that Crawford's *The Doctrine of Holy Scripture Respecting the Atonement*, first published in 1871, would make an excellent follow-up to this reprint?

Christian Focus Publications

The Silent Shades of Sorrow by C.H.Spurgeon, compiled by Zack Erswine. Paper, ISBN 978-1-78191-585-1, 144pp, £7.99

C.H. Spurgeon has often been called "the Prince of Preachers". His sermons attracted a regular weekly congregation of 6,000; they were published and sold for one penny every Monday and remain widely available. This small volume, subtitled "Healing for the Wounded" gathers together six excellent sermons on sorrow: "A Frail Leaf" from Job 13, David remembering the Lord when his soul was cast down in Psalm 42, two sermons on Elijah under the juniper tree, the Man of Sorrows in Isaiah 53, and that wonderful promise in Psalm 147, "He heals the broken in heart". In all of this, Spurgeon speaks from experience, having suffered much with depression himself. The tone throughout is very human and sympathetic, recognising the natural as well as the spiritual causes of sorrow, and looking always to Christ for the answer. Interestingly, he uses the term "prince of preachers" in one of these sermons: "It is not the oration of an Apollos, nor the wondrous words of a prince of preachers. It is the still small voice of God which alone confers the peace which passes all understanding" One can only pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to use these sermons for the lifting up of the downcast today. - Robert Dale

2000 Years of Christ's Power Vol. 4: The Age of Religious Conflict by Nick Needham. Hardcover, Pp. 686. ISBN 9781781917817, £19.99 (With Grace Publication Trust)

It has been over a decade since Volume 3 of Professor Needham's series on Church history appeared, but in 2016 the long wait ended. The book is, like its predecessors, large in size, but written in a readable and accessible style. In these pages Needham takes us through the period 1560-1740, covering not only Protestantism, but also Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. The subtitle is intended to convey not only that the period was characterised by conflict between religious traditions, but that there was conflict within those traditions. Inevitably even a large volume like this is unable to cover everything of importance in the era, but Needham does a fine job of introducing the period. Well worth reading.

Annual General Meeting

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Trinitarian Bible Society**

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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.

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MINISTERS' RELIEF SOCIETY

(Established 1872)

Serves the Lord by bringing together cases where Ministers of the Gospel or their dependants are in financial need and Churches or individuals who channel funds through us.

We need to hear from you if you or your Church is able to help financially or if you know of situations where our ministry may be needed.

For further details contact:

Mr. Alan Lathey, 2 Queensberry Road, Pen-y-lan, Cardiff CF23 9JJ

In This Issue

Page 1 *Editorial*

Page 3 *William Williams, Pantycelyn*

Page 21 *We Have an Altar*

Page 26 *The Great Heresies - 5: Nestorianism and Eutychianism*

Page 39 *The Gospel Minister's Preparation*

Page 42 *Book Reviews*

Page 46 *Annual General Meeting*

THE GOSPEL OF SOVEREIGN GRACE

by **HENRY ATHERTON**

Sermons and addresses by the first Secretary of the Sovereign Grace Union
Copies are available from:

The Secretary, SGU, 43 Warwick Road, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 8PQ

East Anglia Auxiliary

June 14th, Wednesday 7.30pm

Hethersett Baptist Church, Norfolk NR9 3JH

Speaker: Mr. Edward Malcolm (Reading, Berks.)

Thursday 13th July 7:30pm

Rehoboth Strict Baptist Chapel Sible Hedingham

Essex CO9 3PH

Speaker: Pastor Kehinde Omatayo

Surrey Auxiliary

26th April, Wednesday 7PM

Bethel Chapel, The Bars

Guildford GU1 4LP

Speaker: D. V. Underwood

Deputation Meeting

21st April, Friday 7 PM

Providence Baptist Chapel, Blunham

Bedfordshire MK44 3NH

Speaker: Pastor Chalan Hetherington

Kent Auxiliary

Tuesday 2nd May 7.30 pm

Mount Zion Baptist Church Ashford

Speaker: Austin Walker

Subject: Justification by Faith

Wednesday 12th July 7.30 pm

Grace Chapel Folkestone, Kent

Speaker: Chris Buss

Subject: Grace versus Free Will

Hampshire

Thursday 8th June 7pm

Salem Baptist Chapel Portsmouth

Speaker: Mr. A.G. Randalls

As ministers are willing to travel considerable distances to speak at these gatherings, it would be appreciated if friends and supporters of the Union could be present, if at all possible.

Leaflets announcing the meetings, for display on Chapel notice boards, etc., will be made available nearer the time of the meetings.