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## “Thou Hast Made . . . ”

Towards the end of last year, a team of Australian and Indonesian scientists announced in the science magazine *Nature* that they had discovered a whole new race of human-like creatures who had lived on Flores, one of the smaller islands of Indonesia. As reported in *Time* magazine, “the beings were not, like the Pygmies of equatorial Africa, just a short variety of modern *Homo sapiens*. Dubbed *Homo floresiensis*, they represent an entirely new twig on the human family tree”. What was discovered was in fact one nearly-complete skeleton, one metre tall – and so about the size of a three-year-old child today – and also fragments of six other individuals. However there were indications that the skeleton belonged to a fully-grown adult.

Of course, the discovery was immediately interpreted in evolutionary terms. Yet reports that other Indonesian scientists have strongly refuted many of these claims seem to have been ignored by most of the media. An article in the *Jakarta Post* quotes a paleoanthropology professor from Gadjah Mada University as saying: “The skeleton is not a new species as claimed by these scientists, but simply . . . of a modern human, *Homo sapiens*, that lived about 1300 to 1800 years ago”.<sup>1</sup>

The argument will no doubt continue, but we are not left, in our attempts to make sense of human origins, to fortuitous discoveries of old bones, analysed in the light of some evolutionary philosophy. God has revealed in the Bible the origin of all things. This is summed up in the straightforward words with which Genesis commences: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”. During the first six days of time, the whole universe – the heaven and the earth – was fashioned into its present form and all living creatures were brought into existence. The climax of that work was the creation of man from the dust of the earth.

It should be emphasised, in the face of most contemporary thinking, that God’s work in creation was purposeful. Richard Dawkins, who holds the chair of Public Understanding of Science in Oxford University is one of

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in *Hobbling the Hobbit? Indonesian scientists reject the hype about “Flores Man”*, an article on the Answers in Genesis website.

the most militant of today's evolutionists. In a recent book, he has described as "a perniciously misleading message" the idea that evolution is "aimed at [producing] humans". He insists: "Evolution is not aimed at anything". Indeed, we may be "descended from slime, the product of a blind, soulless, unconscious process". Yet in spite of all this, Dawkins seems to believe in some form of moral obligation. "I have always been very hostile", he declares, "to the idea that we should be uncompassionate because nature is."<sup>2</sup> But it is mere wishful thinking to seek to impose the idea of compassion, and any degree of moral obligation, on a race of beings who are the product of a blind, soulless, unconscious process.

There is no doubt that evolution has been one of the most effective means of destroying confidence in Christianity and the Bible, and of encouraging people to put God into the background and forget about Him. Yet it is only God's restraining grace – including what remains of a Christian heritage in the Western world – that has made it possible for some degree of compassion to survive in this godless generation. Compassion is of the essence of obedience to the second table of God's law, summed up in the requirement to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Yes, there is indeed a God – a God who has revealed Himself in the Bible. There He has made known the purpose for which He created the universe: His own glory. And man, as a creature with intelligence, is consciously to live to God's glory. Though he has fallen from his original state, when he was indeed able to live perfectly to God's glory, man remains under that obligation – which includes keeping both the first and second tables of the law. It is required of him particularly that he should believe in the Saviour whom God has appointed – His own Son, who came into this rebellious world to die for the unworthy. But it is only through the salvation which the Son of God has provided that anyone can begin to live to God's glory. How necessary then to seek salvation, in spite of all the propaganda which has the effect of preventing sinners from remembering their Creator.

Yet, more than perhaps most readers of the Bible realise, the doctrine of creation runs as a solid thread of truth all the way from Genesis to Revelation. Not least does the Fourth Commandment support this doctrine: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work . . . for in six days *the Lord made* heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it". The recurring pattern, throughout the whole of time, of six days of labour and one day to be specially set apart

<sup>2</sup>From Dawkins' *The Ancestor's Tale*, as quoted in *The Herald*, 1 October 2004.

for the worship of the Creator, echoes the creation week. And one might note, in the light of how the Commandment is expressed, that it seems utterly impossible to imagine that the days of creation lasted any longer than the normal 24 hours.

Again and again in the pages of Scripture, testimony is borne to the fact that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth – in other words, of the whole universe. Nehemiah brought this forward as the fundamental fact of the whole of human history: “*Thou hast made* heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and Thou preservest them all” (Neh 9:6). And God’s creation of the universe and His preserving it in existence is made matter of praise and worship. It is true that God is to be worshipped for what He is in Himself, but He is also to be worshipped as we contemplate His works. And how can we do so appropriately unless we accept God’s own testimony to His work of creation?

As the Psalmist lifted up his eyes to the hills on which the temple was built, and thought on the God whose temple it was, he declared: “My help cometh from the Lord, *which made* heaven and earth” (Ps 121:2); such was his confidence in this all-powerful God. The fact that the Most High had created everything led him to consider this God as more than powerful enough to help him in every difficulty. He never slumbered, and would preserve the Psalmist in his “going out” and “coming in” for ever. David made a similar declaration: “Our help is in the name of the Lord, *who made* heaven and earth” (Ps 124:8), though he spoke for others as well as for himself. And no doubt this statement was made particularly in the name of the people of God as a whole. The all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth is the One the Church must look to in all her needs.

Perhaps this Psalm was in Hezekiah’s mind when Jerusalem was under siege from the Assyrian army. Certainly, after Rabshakeh’s blasphemous speech, “Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said, O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; *Thou hast made* heaven and earth” (2 Ki 19:15). And the God who encouraged such a faith was faithful to him; in answer to prayer the Assyrian army withdrew and Hezekiah was left victorious. So, when the Lord would encourage His people to expect a return from Babylon, He sent Isaiah to prophesy of Cyrus, the Persian king who was to be raised up for their deliverance. And He pointed to His own power: “*I have made* the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded” (Is 45:12). God did not merely reveal the fact of future deliverance; He also encouraged His

people to believe the fact by directing them to the almighty power which had been revealed in the work of creation.

Jeremiah understood this, even in a time when the Lord's cause was in a particularly desperate state. "Ah Lord God!" he cried, "behold, *Thou hast made* the heaven and the earth by Thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for Thee" (Jer 32:17). Again, a spiritually-minded man in Judah was taking encouragement from that great display of God's power which had brought the whole universe into existence. On another occasion, Jeremiah had referred to the same truth: "He hath made the earth by His power, He hath established the world by His wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by His discretion" (Jer 10:12); the prophet was bringing out the fact that in God's creation we are to see evidence of His power, wisdom and understanding. Would that people in this generation were as ready to see the significance of creation!

Let us turn now to the New Testament and notice how the disciples addressed the Most High when they were persecuted by the Jewish authorities: "Lord, Thou art God, *which hast made* heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is". And in the light of this truth, they asked that signs and wonders might be done by the name of God's "holy child Jesus" (Acts 4:24-30). In very different circumstances, when Paul was addressing the people of Athens on Mars' hill after discovering the altar inscribed to the unknown god, he told them: "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you. *God that made* the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:24,25). Finally, let us note the loud voice that was heard in heaven calling for God to be worshipped as Creator: "Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgement is come: and worship *Him that made* heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (Rev 14:7).

The doctrine of creation is indeed a thread which runs through the whole of Scripture; it is clearly not something peripheral. And, although atheists and many others would emphatically deny it, Scripture is the lens through which we must view the whole of history – past, present and future – and this is how we should view, in particular, the collection of bones on the island of Flores. We must be ready to listen to the all-powerful Creator rather than to man. The teaching of Scripture is clear; it gives us God's plain testimony: "*I have made* the earth, and created man upon it" (Is 45:12). The purpose for which man was created is equally plain; we are directed: "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name" (Ps 96:8). Let us seek grace to do so!

# Personal and National Reformation<sup>1</sup>

A Sermon by *Thomas Boston*

Zechariah 12:12. *And the land shall mourn, every family apart, the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart.*

**D***octrine 2.* The outpouring of the Spirit will make a blessed change on the case of a people or person otherwise hopeless. “The land shall mourn.” Strong is the grace of God, and it will prevail when it enters the lists with corruption, whatever be the advantage on its side.

I will illustrate this from the case to which the text refers. Consider here these things shining in this case:

(1.) Grace can bring them back whose corruptions have carried them quite off the foundation. So are the Jews who despise Christ as a mere man. Such a case is absolutely hopeless in itself but grace can bring one out of it. He that hath made the rejected stone the Head of the corner can make of the rejecters lively stones built up upon Him (Compare 1 Pet 2:5 with 1 Pet 1:1).

(2.) Grace can overcome the strongest, and root out the deepest, prejudices against religion. No people in the world are so deeply prejudiced against Christianity as the Jews. But an outpouring of the Spirit will totally carry away their prejudices. When the eye is ill affected, things appear in quite the wrong colours; but the Spirit will cure the eye, and then the beauty of religion will recommend itself (Song 5:9 and 6:1).

(3.) Grace can draw men out of the way in which an erring conscience fixes them. The bond of conscience, right or wrong, is one of the strongest ties of the soul; therefore publicans and harlots entered into the kingdom of God before the scribes and Pharisees. The gospel had readier access into the hearts of pagans than of Jews. When sin is held fast as a part of religion, it is fixed as with bars of iron. Satan is most successful when he drives a wedge of God’s wood. This he does with the Jews at this day, who oppose Christ from a blinded conscience of the honour of God and His law. But grace will reach them; it did so most effectually with Paul, who verily thought that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

(4.) There is no authority against the grace of God. By means of unbelief, Satan has had 1700 years’ possession of that people as his slaves. The fathers have taught the children from generation to generation to reject Jesus

<sup>1</sup>The second of two parts of a sermon preached in 1716, reprinted, slightly abridged, from Boston’s *Works*, vol 3. In the first part, printed last month and entitled “The Salvation of the Jews”, he spoke on his first *doctrine*: “A day is coming in which there shall be a national salvation of the Jews . . .”. The change of title for this part reflects the change of subject.

Christ. Yet grace will recover them after all from the fraudulent possessor, though he had so long kept possession.

(5.) Grace will do what the heaviest strokes of judgement could not do. The sin of the Jews in crucifying Christ was without a parallel; so their punishment also was a matchless punishment. It was such "great tribulation, as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be". They are under the weight of it till this day. But it has done them no good. O, hopeless case! But hopeless as it is, an outpouring of the Spirit will make a blessed change.

(6.) It will put an end to a national hardness. When a nation is blessed with light and they abuse it, God is provoked to plague them with judicial hardness and blindness. Such has been the case of the Jews for 1700 years (Rom 11:8-10). Fearful case! But an outpouring of the Spirit unlooses these bands of death.

*Uses:* 1. Behold here the freedom and power of the grace of God. It is matchlessly free; it shines like the sun without hire and blows where it listeth. O what wide steps free grace makes to catch a lost creature, what mountains it skips over! It steps over even Paul's injuries and blasphemies. O the power of it! It is the wind of the Lord's Spirit that blows down cedars by the roots, rends the rocks and makes the iron gates of the devil's prison give way. The strong chains wherewith he binds his prisoners become like tow that the fire has kindled upon. It tames the sinner that has long been wild, melts the heart of adamant and makes them mourn as doves who, like the leviathan, count darts as stubble and laugh at the shaking of a spear.

2. You that would fain have Christ and His grace, be not faithless but believing. Whatever your case, do not conclude it is hopeless with respect to the Physician. I think there always is a secret despair of grace, and more than we are aware of. They say there is no hope. Some think Satan's bonds on them are so strong that there is no breaking of them; their plague sore has run so very long that it will never heal now; God has so much given up with them that He will never more look near them. And if they be praying that the Lord would break these bonds, Satan steps forward to them and whispers in their ear, as in Mark 5:36, "Thy daughter is dead; why troublest thou the Master?" But, in verse 36, Jesus saith, "Be not afraid, only believe".

3. If you would ever see a reformation in the land, trust more to an outpouring of the Spirit on the land than to judgement, were it ever so severe. It is a folly to be fond of a national stroke; that is the effect of a bitter spirit, not of the Spirit of God. Jeremiah said, "As for me, I have not hastened from being a pastor to follow Thee: neither have I desired the evil day, Thou knowest". The most tremendous judgements will not reform a nation without

an outpouring of the Spirit, but an outpouring of the Spirit will do it without any outward calamity at all. Our country has had a heavy stroke within these few months, and many a family are mourning under the weight of it this day. But are we any nearer reformation than we were? The Lord has made death ride in triumph among us of late. Our kirk door is beset with new graves; burials have followed fast at the heels of one another. But whoso considers how far people are from being bettered by these dispensations of providence, may justly fear the time cometh when deaths shall be more frequent but burials more rare (Amos 6:7-11).

4. Yet despair not of the reformation of the land or of particular persons, but pray for an outpouring of the Spirit. O wrestle with God and lift up a cry for it. That is a sovereign remedy that would cure all our diseases at once: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: Thou hast the dew of Thy youth". The work of reformation has long been like corn in a great drought, yellow at the root. A shower of the Spirit would make all green again and grow fast.

As much as we are divided, this would unite us. As bold-faced as wickedness and profanity are, this would stop their mouths. As little good as the gospel does, this would make a convincing, converting and confirming work more frequent and give ministers of the gospel as much to do with broken hearts as they now have with hard and impenitent ones. As great as lifelessness and untenderness are among ministers and people, this would purify the sons of Levi and make the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem pleasant to the Lord, as in former years. It would restore our judges as at the first and our counsellors as at the beginning, and make nobles cease from building Babel and pulling down the church and religion; it would put holiness to the Lord on the bells of their horses, and they would willingly set their shoulder to the work of the Lord. O pray for this. And let not your hopelessness and uncharitableness as to any ranks of people in the land, whether because of their profanity, apostasy, formality, deadness, enmity to religion and hurtfulness to the Church, shuffle them out of your prayers for good. But cry mightily for the outpouring of the Spirit, so that the whole land may mourn.

**Doctrine 3.** They that share in the outpouring of the Spirit, will bring home public, national guilt to their own doors and mourn for it. The cause of this mourning, in the text, is the crucifying of Christ (v 10). Their fathers did it, and many generations have since passed; but when the time comes that the Spirit is poured out, the then generation shall cry out, Guilty, guilty, and mourn for it, in families and alone, each by himself, as if they had been the persons that embued their hands in His blood.

**Reasons:** 1. They will find then that they have smarted under it, and borne

in their own persons the marks of God's indignation against the national guilt. In the mean time they will be persuaded of the justice and holiness of God's procedure, saying, Our fathers have sinned and are not; and we have borne their iniquities (Lam 5:7). In the natural body, if one member suffer, the rest suffer with it; so it is in the political body. When God is angry with our mother, the children cannot escape a share of the frowns. Children will therefore be affected with the offence, as if they had given it themselves.

2. However unbroken hearts may justify themselves as to national guilt, especially that wherein they had no active hand, yet the light of God's Spirit shining into the heart will bring in the soul guilty in that point – there being so many ways by which one person's sins may become another's, which a tender soul will not dare to purge itself of. They each say with Isaiah: "Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts" (Is 6:5). He who hath been among the infected would have much to do (if of a tender conscience) to swear himself clean; so hard it is, if not impossible, for sinful men to be members of a nation and not some way or other to be tinctured with the national guilt.

3. God deals with those of a nation or church as one collective body, and tender souls, seeing themselves to be of a guilty body, will each take it home to himself. Hence the holy men of God make confession of national guilt as their own, being themselves of the body, and are affected with it as their sin in particular (Dan 9:5-19).

*Uses:* 1. This shows us the acknowledgement of national guilt that is acceptable in the sight of God, namely, when people bring it home to their own doors, and lay it before the Lord, as that of which they cannot cleanse themselves, but need the blood of Christ to take away their share of the guilt. He that looks through the land this day and beholds the profanity, apostasy and crying sins of the land, in former and the present generations, and takes up the stone to throw at the guilty, even in respect of those very sins in which he had no active hand, as the murder of the saints and the like, hath very little, if any, of the Spirit of God. They are not of the spirit of Phinehas the son of Eleazar, nor disposed to say with Jeremiah: "The crown is fallen from our head; woe unto us that we have sinned!" (Lam 5:16). It will never be our complaining of national guilt only as the sin of others before God, but bringing it home to our own doors, that will be accepted.

2. This shows what will bring all to admit their own part in the causes of wrath against the land. There is a great complaint which all ranks of persons have against one another this day: everyone hides his sin and will not admit his guilt, whereby the anger of the Lord is caused to go out against us. But

if there were an outpouring of the Spirit on the generation, it would make a loosening among us as ever there was in the frozen waters by a thaw. It would set all hearts a-mourning, eyes a-weeping, tongues a-confessing. Each one a-crying, What have I done? It would pull off the fig leaves wherewith people now cover their nakedness, and the patches wherewith they cover their loathsome sores. O pray for the blessed day.

**Doctrine 4.** Family and personal humiliation and reformation, spreading through a land, is true national humiliation and reformation. Consider:

1. The nation is really nothing but so many families united in one body; therefore as the curing of a man's body is nothing but the restoring of health to its several members, so national reformation is nothing but personal and family reformation grown universal, or at least general. Many talk of national reformation who are little solicitous about these, whether their own or their neighbours'. Deceit is wrapped up in fair generals. But it is as great a blunder in religion as it would be in medicine to tell the physician you would have him cure your body, but he may let the members be as they are.

2. Is the humiliation of the several parts not the humiliation and reformation of the whole? Would a number of reformed persons not make a reformed family? Would reformed families not make a reformed congregation? Would reformed congregations not make a reformed national Church? How was the world corrupted? Did one man not poison the whole? Was it not wickedness, spreading from one to another, that sunk the world in wickedness. We must begin at the fountain if we would stop the stream. When a house is on fire, the fire takes hold on one part and spreads through the rest; when it is quenched, one runs with his bucket to one part, another with his bucket to another part, and so it is put out. Even so must it be in the case before us.

3. In what way does the influence of magistrates, ministers and other church officers reach to national reformation but as it reaches to families and particular persons? If they do not endeavour to reform these and yet pretend to national reformation, it is a contradiction; it is building a castle in the air. If the disease be grown so strong that their endeavours can do nothing to reform particular persons and families, how is national reformation possible?

4. If one has a mind to reform his family, how can he do it but by reforming himself and the particular members of his family – by setting up and keeping up the pure worship of God, maintaining unity and peace, and exciting the several members of it to the duties of piety, righteousness and sobriety, and curbing sin in himself and them. Even so it is with national reformation. Therefore, both the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant condescended upon personal and family reformation as that without which national reformation cannot subsist.

5. Though public humiliation in public assemblies be necessary, yet real humiliation and reformation lies here. Apart from this, all public humiliations are but a hypocritical show (Is 58:5,6). If ever the Lord will pour His Spirit in a notable measure on this Church and nation, such public humiliations will be grounds of public and personal humiliation afterwards and really mourned over, as that whereby God has been dishonoured, insofar as personal, family and national reformation has not been joined with them.

6. Personal and family reformation is the bond of reformation, in respect of the truth and ordinances of God. Where that is lacking, church reformation cannot last; however pure it may be, it is a flower set in the ground without a root, that quickly withers. What a good reformation there was in Hezekiah's days, but in the days of his son all goes (2 Chr 33:9,10). So it was also in Josiah's days, but immediately afterwards all goes to wreck. How could this be, but that real personal religion was still far off? But on the other hand, family and personal reformation would make people duly concerned for obtaining truth and purity and would cause it to be retained.

*Uses:* 1. This teaches us that there is no true national reformation without family and personal reformation. In vain do we pretend to the one without the other. If a nation have never so much purity of truth and ordinances, God will never count them pure without reformation of life. Nay, the purity of ordinances will aggravate their condemnation. The more light there is, while there is little holiness in a Church or nation, the more terrible will their judgement be. Laodicea's hypocrisy was her ruin (Rev 3:16). The church of Ephesus was very zealous against error (Rev 2:6). Discipline was vigorously exercised against the erroneous (Rev 2:2). Yet, alas, she had lost the vigour of real holiness; therefore unless she speedily repented and returned to her first works, she was to be visited with the heaviest judgements (Rev 2:4,5).

2. As many persons in the land as will not amend their ways, so many hinderers there are of national reformation. If these things were considered, many persons would be found guilty of preventing national reformation who think they are very far from being chargeable with it. Consider your own sins impartially and remember that, so far as you are deficient in personal holiness and reformation, so far are you guilty before God of hindering the reformation of the land. How should the land mourn? Is it not every family apart? While the house is on fire, you are chargeable with the ruin of it if you do not use your bucket to put out the flame in the place nearest you.

3. Let none say they can do nothing towards a national reformation, for every person can do something for it if they will. What we call our *cannot*, God calls our *will not*. His command is: "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin" (Ezek 18:30). But, says

He, “Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40). But it is not easy to get our corrupt hearts to comply with what God calls us to. If people would keep their zeal for reformation and increase it, it might do much good to warm those that are more indifferent (2 Cor 11:2). Everyone in their own sphere must set about reformation. What can we do? Reform yourselves and your families, and labour to spread it among them whom you can converse with. Your own eternal interest, and that of others, require this of you; and it might be of good use to the Church:

(1.) Set about personal reformation in heart and life. Thus we find in Nehemiah 3 that everyone laboured in repairing the wall over against his own house. Though you cannot repair the whole wall, yet will you not repair over against your own chamber? “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?” Look into the house and you will see it stands much in need of cleansing. There are buyers and sellers within that heart of thine that need to be driven out in the practice of mortification. Cleanse the outer court of thy life, thy words and actions. See well to the inner court, the hidden man of the heart.

(2.) Set about family reformation. Every Christian family is, or should be, a church in the house (1 Cor 16:19). True doctrine should be maintained and propagated in it by reading the Word and instructing the members of the family. Saith God, “These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deut 6:6,7). There should be pure worship of prayers and praises; and holy discipline and good government, for the encouragement of piety and suppressing of sin in the family (Ps 101). And to advance these, everyone is to hold hand, as they would have the Lord to dwell in the family.

(3.) Help forward the reformation of other persons and families, and particularly of the congregation whereof you are members. It is to the commendation of the Tekoites (Neh 3:5-27) that they were resolved not to be idle while there was anything to do. They had less encouragement than others from their nobles, but they were not the more slack as a result. Everyone is our neighbour, and we have a relation to all, to engage us to be useful to them as far as we can. “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). Thus you may be useful for national reformation two ways:

[1.] That part of it falling to your share is done, and so it is not all lying behind. God will notice who puts his hand to the work as well as who stands back from it. Nay, He notices how everyone works (Neh 3:20). Your labour shall not be in vain. God reckons him a Christian who repents of all his

known sins; and he that in his sphere does what he can towards national reformation, God will reckon him one that would have reformed the whole land if he could.

[2.] Your example will have a tendency to stir up others. The flame that burns the house must rise in some place, and some person must take the lead in reformation. O but that is an honourable post! Paul speaks most affectionately of Epaphroditus as the first-fruits of Achaia unto Christ, and tells us that the zeal of the Corinthians provoked very many. When the first-fruits come, the whole harvest follows. Though it would not have that effect, yet it will be your best testimony against your defection and the apostasy of the day.

To excite you to family and personal reformation, consider that this is always very necessary, especially at this time when God is pleading with us in such a manner, many families mourning for the loss of their relations. And we do not know how soon the cup may come to ourselves, if the Lord do not stay His hand. It is an ordinary excuse for doing nothing that we cannot do all; but it is insufficient. In Ezra's days, the building of the temple was interrupted for many years, yet they built the altar (Ezra 3:2). Though we cannot reform the land, we may do something towards it.

Though you cannot stop the flood of iniquity and apostasy through the land, yet you may put a stop to that part of it which is in your own course and life. You might do something to stop it in your family and neighbourhood. But the commons are as the nobles; they will not put their shoulder to the Lord's work. They are not their brother's keepers; though they can speak well enough in their own cause, they have not a mouth to open for the cause of God. We are all persuaded public oaths have done much mischief to this church and nation. This we cannot help, but may we not reform the common profane swearing among us, that no one imposes. They need a brow of brass that will pretend a zeal against the former and yet use profane swearing in their own conversation, or are at no pains to reform it in others.

Though we cannot get the land to mourn, yet we may mourn over our own family and its case. Though we cannot get national humiliations for all that we judge to be sins of the land, yet we may get personal and family fasts and humiliations for them. In these we may be as particular as we please. And if they put us to this course, it would be good evidence that the sins of the land are not merely a matter of discourse with us, but of solemn seriousness.

Through unbelief, we are prone to think of God as removed to a great distance from us, whereas we ought to have the impressive conviction that we are in His immediate presence, and that He is the witness of all the desires and emotions of our hearts. In nothing is there a greater difference between our theoretical and practical belief than in regard to the omnipresence of God.

*Archibald Alexander*

## The Providence of God

### 2. Problems and Solutions

*Rev H M Cartwright*

We must now refer to (2) *some problems which are raised in connection with the doctrine*. It will be sufficient to state these problems briefly as more will be said about them when we think of solutions and applications.

(a) Many who are hostile to the concept of a God who has created all things, and is preserving and governing His creation, attempt to justify their unbelief on the basis of the evil and the suffering which exist in the world. This often comes out on occasions when human beings commit exceptionally great atrocities or are subjected to exceptionally great calamities. Someone has said that “the question is as simple as the answer is difficult: How can a God who is absolutely good allow evil in His creation? . . . John Stuart Mill, among others, argued that, given the presence of evil in the world, God is either not omnipotent or not loving (or good).”<sup>1</sup>

(b) Some of the Lord’s people have found it difficult to come to terms with the frequently-occurring fact that the wicked prosper while the Lord’s people are plagued and chastened every morning (Ps 73:3,12,14). “And they say, How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the most High?” (Ps 73:11). “No man knoweth love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth as he that feareth an oath” (Ecc 9:2).

(c) Perhaps the main problem felt even by those most sympathetic to the doctrine relates to its implications for the freedom and responsibility of the moral agents who accomplish God’s purposes. If everything is determined by God according to “the free and immutable counsel of His own will”<sup>2</sup> and brought about by His “almighty power”, what room is there for freedom of choice and action and for responsibility for one’s choices and actions?

(d) In the light of these things there is the problem of how we are to interpret and respond to what God is saying to us in His providence. How should we understand the significance of what God does in His providence?

(3) We may now turn to *some solutions offered to these problems*.

(a) Of course the common “solution” today is to deny the existence of God. Berkouwer helpfully discusses two main reasons for modern atheism:

<sup>1</sup>R C Sproul, *The Invisible Hand: Do all things really work for good?*, p 159.

<sup>2</sup>*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 5.

(1) Theologians had proclaimed a God who was only love and was made in the image of human love and was incapable of wrath. “But in catastrophe, in the trenches, the caves and the concentration camps of this world, the eternal Philanthropist was exposed as a delusion. . . . When this God-concept fell, the confession of the Church seemed for many to fall with it. Disfigured even in church and theology, the real confession of the providence of God was and is by many unknown or misunderstood. . . . The Bible does not present providence as an obvious reflection of repose, evolution and security. It witnesses to the Lord of Hosts, to His judgement and grace, to the clouds shrouding His throne (Ps 97:2). A one-sided, optimistic God-concept is in absolute contradiction to the God-picture of, for instance, Psalm 46. . . . The comfort that comes to us in this gospel is first seen against the background of real wrath and real judgement. The comfort is revealed in this, that Jesus Christ saves us from that wrath (1 Th 1:10). . . . This genial providence, this grace without judgement, this love without justice, this forgiveness without redemption, forms the background of the crisis of our century.”<sup>3</sup>

The other point he makes is (2) that “natural science has been the bridge on which many have crossed over to unbelief. As nature has been consistently reduced to natural causes, the ‘hypothesis’ of God’s preservation and rule of the world has been rendered less necessary. The enlightened scientific mind has come to look on the providence doctrine more or less as a bromide [a dose of sodium or potassium bromide given as a sedative] convenient for pre-scientific naiveté, but now rendered unpalatable by the ‘deeper insights’ of the scientific method. . . . Now that nature has given up her secrets and man has seen through what used to be called supernatural, the world has been relieved of God.”<sup>4</sup> The regularity and kindness of the providence of God has been perverted by sinful human nature to make people feel that there is no need for either God or providence. More recent writers on providence have pointed out that the rejection of God and His providence has resulted in a resurgence of occult, pagan and superstitious endeavours to probe beyond what one has called “life without a vertical perspective”,<sup>5</sup> and another “a closed, mechanistic universe”.<sup>6</sup>

(b) Others accept the existence of a Being whom they describe as God but solve the problems to which we have referred by denying that, in all that occurs, God is “immutably and infallibly” bringing to pass what He has decreed. Some dismiss the problem of evil by asserting that it is accounted

<sup>3</sup>G C Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, pp 26-28.

<sup>4</sup>Berkouwer, p 18.

<sup>5</sup>Berkouwer, p 23.

<sup>6</sup>Sproul, p 14.

for by God's permission and man's free will. This does not explain how those who were created perfect chose evil or why God gave them that freedom. It does not explain how "permission" relieves God of responsibility, or how God can infallibly bring to pass what He has purposed if there are areas in which creatures are in control and God is only responding.

Calvin says that "the carnal mind can scarcely comprehend how, when acting by their means, He contracts no taint from their impurity, nay, how, in a common operation, He is exempt from all guilt and can justly condemn His own ministers. Hence a distinction has been invented between *doing* and *permitting*, because to many it seemed altogether inexplicable how Satan and all the wicked are so under the hand and authority of God that He directs their malice to whatever end He pleases and employs their iniquities to execute His judgements. The modesty of those who are thus alarmed at the appearance of absurdity might perhaps be excused, did they not endeavour to vindicate the justice of God from every semblance of stigma by defending an untruth. . . . He Himself, however, openly declaring that He *does* this, repudiates the evasion."<sup>7</sup>

Job recognised God's hand in all that Satan brought upon him when he said: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Referring to God's threatened judgement on Babylon, it was said: "The Lord hath opened His armoury and hath brought forth the weapons of His indignation: for this is the work of the Lord God of hosts in the land of the Chaldeans" (Jer 50:25). The early Church recognised God's hand in the works of wicked men: "Against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:27,28). This "solution" is provided at the expense of making God less than God.

(c) Other attempts have been made, even by people who accept in some form the truth concerning God's providence, to resolve these problems by resorting to philosophising, assuming that reason can provide the answers. Some, from ancient times, have traced good and evil to two distinct, eternally-existing sources. Some have suggested that evil takes on a different character when the purpose for which it exists or occurs is taken into account. Others have kept closer to truth in their speculations. But we will not go further down that line because all such attempts proceed from the notion that God's ways must be justifiable at the bar of unbelieving human reason.

(d) As Robert Shaw says, "The full elucidation of this abstruse subject, so as to remove every difficulty, surpasses the human faculties. We are certain

<sup>7</sup>*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Beveridge ed, vol 1, p 199.

that God is concerned in all the actions of His creatures; we are equally certain that God cannot be the author of sin; and here we ought to rest.”<sup>8</sup> Sproul says that “there is a big difference between a mystery and a contradiction . . . ‘the finite cannot grasp the infinite’ . . . . Even in our glorified state we will still be finite. We will still be creatures. . . . There is much room in the Christian faith for paradox and mystery, but no room for contradictions.”<sup>9</sup>

As John Dick puts it: “This is a subject too high for our faculties. We know that God is concerned in all the actions of His creatures, that nothing takes place without His permission, that men are dependent upon Him and cannot move or breathe or think without His assistance. But the exact limit between the actions of the Creator and the actions of His rational creatures we cannot define. Let us be content with what we know and make a practical improvement of it. Let us adore that mighty Being who rules over all. Let us implore His direction and aid and let us remember that, whatever theories speculative men may adopt, conscience and Scripture and reason declare that we are accountable creatures and that He who is the constant witness of our conduct will hereafter sit in judgement upon us and reward or punish us according to our works.”

He urges us not to “be surprised that we cannot throw such light on this and many other points as shall dispel every shade of obscurity. Perfect knowledge is not given to man, the range of whose faculties is very confined, and who often encounters moral as well as physical impediments in the investigation of truth. It seems to have been the will of his Creator that he should be furnished with as much knowledge as should suffice to direct him in the path of duty and in the way to eternal life, but not with the means of gratifying his curiosity and disclosing all the arcana [secrets] of the universe. . . . There is no subject which we do not wish to comprehend and we are unhappy and restless as long as there is any one thing in nature or in grace which we are unable to explain. There is no doubt that, in many instances, this impatience has led not a few persons to push their speculations too far, forgetting their incompetence and ceasing to regard with becoming reverence the sacred barriers which the will of God has opposed to their progress.”<sup>10</sup>

John Love writes to the same effect: “Those two questions – why sin was permitted to come into the universe, which had been created by a God who is infinitely good and averse to sin and infinitely able to have prevented its entrance, and how it was introduced – are wrapped up in darkness, to us

<sup>8</sup>*An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, p 70.

<sup>9</sup>*The Invisible Hand*, pp 83,84.

<sup>10</sup>*Lectures on Theology*, 1846 ed, p 226.

impenetrable. To the blessed, in the state of vision, they will be answered so far as to justify God in the most ample manner and to satisfy them as to the fitness of those arrangements in the universe. . . . These reasons have not been revealed, and we may conclude therefore that it is not good for us at present to know them. Here let our understandings bow before the unutterable majesty of the divine wisdom . . . . We ought therefore to adhere strictly to divine revelation and not to give loose rein to vain conjectures and reasonings.”<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately, the problems regarding providence find their solution in faith’s confidence in God as He has revealed Himself in the Bible. Some may denounce this as circular reasoning, but the fact of God is so basic to all existence and reality that if it is not accepted as self-evident, one’s reasoning will never come round to it. If the fact of God is accepted, everything else will fall into place in a perfectly consistent manner. God’s revelation of Himself and of His ways of working is a fundamental fact of existence in this world which demands reception on account of its own truthfulness, and this acceptance is described as faith. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). We have to agree with the writer who said that, “after every pilgrimage of thought, we shall have to turn back again to the simplicity of undoubting faith”.<sup>12</sup> As another says, “The Scriptures protest against all independent analyses of the world which leave God, even though temporarily, in the shadows. The decision of faith, which knows from the start that any unrighteousness in God is impossible, is decisive.”<sup>13</sup> We may ask our questions, but we can only find the answers in the revelation which God has given in His Word.

For the believer, Sproul says, “the struggle that remains is that against doubt, against the sinful distrust which seeks to implicate God in man’s sin and which draws the curtain before God’s glory. The struggle with doubt is the struggle against the protest of the autonomous man who sees the limits which God draws to human knowledge as an outrage against his freedom and happiness. Through the sovereignty of His grace this protest is withdrawn. But in the withdrawal of protest worship is born.”<sup>14</sup> The problems which arise in connection with providence are soluble only when reason is informed by faith. What we cannot understand, we must look at in the light of what we know concerning God, as our Lord Himself did: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? Why art Thou so far from helping Me, and

<sup>11</sup>*Memorials*, vol 2, pp 58,59.

<sup>12</sup>Berkouwer, p 160.

<sup>13</sup>Sproul, p 249.

<sup>14</sup>*The Invisible Hand* p 256.

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from the words of My roaring? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. *But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in Thee, and were delivered; they trusted, and Thou didst deliver them*" (Ps 22:1-4).

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## Lessons from Esther<sup>1</sup>

*Thomas M'Crie*

In general, we have here a golden leaf in the book of providence, teaching us that "the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men", and that His government extends over the whole earth. This was the lesson which the king of Babylon was taught emphatically when he was driven from men to dwell with the beasts of the field. And it is also taught in the history of Mordecai. The veil is withdrawn and we see the hand of God directing, controlling, overruling and managing the events of time and the hearts of men. We see that "promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is judge; He putteth down one, and setteth up another". The same lesson is taught us even in the histories of other nations, for nothing can befall a people, a family or an individual without the divine appointment or permission. "God ruleth among the nations."

In the second place, we learn from this portion of Scripture the special care with which God watches over His Church and His people. This is often celebrated in Scripture and presented under various similitudes. At one time it is compared to the attention which a husbandman pays to a favourite spot on which he has bestowed great labour and cost: "Sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." In another place it is likened to the instinctive affection with which the fowl guards its unfledged brood: "As birds flying, so will the Lord of Hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also He will deliver it; and passing over He will preserve it". And again, we find it compared to the tender solicitude with which an affectionate mother watches over the infant on her breast: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee."

The Church has been like a lily among thorns, like a spark in the ocean,

<sup>1</sup>M'Crie (the elder) was a respected Secession minister in Edinburgh until his death in 1835. He is best known for his biography of John Knox, which has been reprinted by Free Presbyterian Publications (paperback, £6.50, reduced to £3.90 till the end of March). This article is reprinted from the concluding chapter of M'Crie's *Lectures on Esther*.

like a besieged city. But no weapon formed against her has prospered. We see this exemplified in the divine conduct towards the posterity of Abraham, throughout their whole history. "When they were but a few men in number, yea, very few, and strangers in" the land, "He suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, He reprov'd kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm." How did He watch over them when oppressed in Egypt, when wandering in the wilderness, and after they were settled in Canaan! Nor was His care of them confined to the promised land; it continued after they were scattered for their sins, and when "they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people". Though they were sown among all nations, yet not one grain of the seed was lost. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah testify to the divine preservation of the remnant which returned from the captivity; and the Book of Esther bears witness that those who were left behind were not forgotten.

The same care was extended to the Church under the new dispensation. Remember what a watchful providence was exerted over the infant child Jesus, and over the infant Christian Church! Consult the records of this care in the Acts of the Apostles (chs 9 and 12), and the prophetic descriptions of it in the Book of Revelation (ch 12). And the same eye which watches over the Church watches over its individual members: "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry".

In the third place, we are called to observe the wonderful manner in which God raises up instruments for the preservation and deliverance of His people. The way in which Esther and Mordecai were raised up for this purpose was truly remarkable and recalls many other instances of a similar kind recorded in Scripture. How wonderful to think that Joseph, hated by his brethren, sold for a slave and cast into prison, should be raised up to preserve the chosen family of God, in consequence of these very disasters! How wonderful that, in the days of Pharaoh, when a decree was passed to destroy all the male children of Israel, it was at this "time Moses was born"; he was exposed on the waters; and this bloody edict was the means, not only of his preservation, but of bringing him into the family of the oppressor, in which he was qualified for the public charge which he afterwards sustained as the deliverer of his people! David was taken from the sheepfold to feed God's people; and Esther, an orphan and an exile, was exalted to be a mother in Israel.

"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" How unlikely it was, and how many difficulties were in the way! To remove these, "a decree went out . . . that all the world should be taxed . . . and Joseph went up from Galilee, *out of the city of Nazareth*, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem". And there Mary brought forth her first-born son, and laid Him

in a manger. Again, another decree went forth for the destruction of little children, in consequence of which the parents fled into Egypt, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called My son". Truly this was a root springing "out of a dry ground"! Could it have been anticipated that this was "the Saviour of the world"?

Who would have thought that a man, born in an obscure village of Germany and brought up in a cloister, would be the instrument of bursting the fetters of superstition and priestcraft and of kindling a fire which the united powers of Europe, civil and ecclesiastical, could not extinguish or suppress? To have seen a young man of rank<sup>2</sup> leaving Scotland, accompanied by two servants, on a tour to the Continent, who would have anticipated that his return would be the signal for emancipating his native country from antichristian bondage, and the means of shedding down on it all the blessings which it enjoys to this day! "O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out!"

In the fourth place, we cannot fail to have observed the surprising manner in which providence opens up the way in which these instruments are destined to act, and provides beforehand for the preservation of His people, and for defeating the plots of her enemies. What could Mordecai or Esther have done for their people if God had not placed them in situations of influence, in which their voice might be heard and their patriotism find scope for its exercise? How much was it beyond the bounds of all probability that an orphan captive should become the favourite spouse of the sultan of Persia! Vashti was established, not only on the throne, but in the affections of her husband, and she had it in her power to preserve both. And yet she was deposed and disgraced to make way for Esther, just in time to enable the latter to crush a vile plot for the extermination of her people. Then there was Mordecai's discovery of the conspiracy against the life of Ahasuerus, and the singular manner in which the king was brought to recollect that favour at the very time that Haman came to request permission to put Mordecai to death. The history of the Church abounds with similar instances of divine interposition; and the life of every private Christian, when closely reviewed, will present to him a multitude of coincidences almost equally surprising which, though apparently fortuitous, are in reality the doings of Him who is "wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working".

Again, how emphatically we are taught by this history the duty of placing our sole trust and dependence on God! "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help." How slippery is the path of ambition! How deceitful the gale of worldly prosperity! And how easy it is

<sup>2</sup>Patrick Hamilton.

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for God to bring down the mighty from their seats and exalt them of low degree! "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God; which made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is; which keepeth truth for ever; which executeth judgement for the oppressed; which giveth food to the hungry. The Lord preserveth the strangers; He relieveth the fatherless and widow; but the way of the wicked He turneth upside down."

In fine, we learn from an examination of this book, the great usefulness of the Old Testament Scriptures and their standing authority as a rule both to individuals and communities. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." This book, in particular, contains lessons fitted alike for the prince on the throne and the lowest menial in his kingdom. It shows us how Christians are expected to act when they are, in providence, elevated to stations of rank, influence and authority. And these lessons are not the less to be regarded because they are to be found in the Old Testament.

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## Christ's Mysterious Ways<sup>1</sup>

*J C Ryle*

**W**e should notice, in this passage, *how mysterious are the ways in which Christ sometimes leads His people*. We are told that, when He talked of going back to Judea, His disciples were perplexed. It was the very place where the Jews had recently tried to stone their Master. To return thither was to plunge into the midst of danger. These timid Galileans could not see the necessity or prudence of such a step. "Goest Thou thither again?" they cried.

Things such as these are often going on around us. The servants of Christ are often placed in circumstances just as puzzling and perplexing as those of the disciples. They are led in ways whose purpose and object they cannot see; they are called to fill positions from which they naturally shrink, and which they would never have chosen for themselves. Thousands in every age are continually learning this by their own experience. The path they are obliged to walk in is not the path of their own choice. At present they cannot see its usefulness or wisdom.

At times like these, a Christian must call into exercise his faith and patience. He must believe that his Master knows best by what road His servant ought to travel and that He is leading him, by the right way, to a city of habitation. He may rest assured that the circumstances in which he is placed are precisely

<sup>1</sup>On John 11:7-16. Reprinted, with slight editing, from *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol 2.

those which are most likely to promote his graces and to check his besetting sins. He need not doubt that what he cannot see now he will understand hereafter. He will find one day that there was wisdom in every step of his journey, though flesh and blood could not see it at the time. If the twelve disciples had not been taken back into Judea, they would not have seen the glorious miracle of Bethany. If Christians were allowed to choose their own course through life, they would never learn hundreds of lessons about Christ and His grace which they are now taught in God's ways. Let us remember these things. The time may come when we shall be called to take some journey in life which we greatly dislike. When that time comes, let us set out cheerfully and believe that all is right.

We should notice, secondly, in this passage, *how tenderly Christ speaks of the death of believers*. He announces the fact of Lazarus being dead in language of singular beauty and gentleness: "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth".

Every true Christian has a Friend in heaven, of almighty power and boundless love. He is thought of, cared for, provided for, defended, by God's eternal Son. He has an unfailing Protector who never slumbers or sleeps and watches continually over his interests. The world may despise him but he has no cause to be ashamed. Even father and mother may cast him out, but Christ, having once taken him up, will never let him go. He is the "friend of Christ" even after he is dead! The friendships of this world are often fair-weather friendships and fail us like summer-dried fountains, when our need is sorest; but the friendship of the Son of God is stronger than death and goes beyond the grave. The Friend of sinners is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

The death of true Christians is "sleep", not annihilation. It is a solemn and miraculous change, no doubt, but not a change to be regarded with alarm. They have nothing to fear for their souls in the change, for their sins are washed away in Christ's blood. The sharpest sting of death is the sense of unpardoned sin. Christians have nothing to fear for their bodies in the change. By and by they will rise again, refreshed and renewed, after the image of the Lord. The grave itself is a conquered enemy. It must render back its tenants safe and sound, the very moment that Christ calls for them at the last day.

Let us remember these things when those whom we love fall asleep in Christ, or when we ourselves receive our notice to quit this world. Let us call to mind in such an hour that our great Friend takes thought for our bodies as well as for our souls, and that He will not allow one hair of our heads to perish. Let us never forget that the grave is the place where the Lord Himself lay and that, as He rose again triumphant from that cold bed, so also shall all His people. To a merely worldly man, death must needs be a terrible thing; but he that has Christian faith may boldly say as he lays down life: "I will

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both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for Thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety” (Ps 4:8).

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## The Wisdom of God in Redemption<sup>1</sup>

### 2. The Works and Sufferings of Christ

*W S Plumer*

The wisdom of God is also manifested in the works and sufferings of the Redeemer:

(1.) In His works. They were all faultless, perfect. Even Pilate found no fault in Him. His works were without a blot or stain. They were many. They exemplified every perfection of God and every virtue of the creature. They set a pattern for every duty; they gave a measure for every attainment; they magnified every precept of the law. His obedience to law wrought out a spotless robe of righteousness for every believer. This is the linen white and clean, called the righteousness of saints. No robe of personal innocence is so glorious. Angels in heaven are not so beautifully adorned. And it is all by the merit of Christ. Thus is boasting excluded, God honoured, the dignity of the heavenly state unimpaired and the sinner abundantly saved. Thus is God’s wisdom displayed in Christ’s works.

(2.) We also see God’s wisdom in Christ’s sufferings. He was subject to the penalty of the law. He suffered as one held guilty in law, not for Himself, but for us whose law-place He took. His sufferings began with His birth and lasted till He expired on Calvary. They were not solely from man but chiefly from God, not merely bodily but mainly mental, not confined to His last hours but running through His whole life, not only present but anticipated for long years (Luke 12:50). “The radical error of the Unitarian system is that men are saved solely by influence or power. But the truth is that we are not saved so much by any action as by a passion, not so much by exertion as by endurance, not chiefly by vital energy but by dying blood. It was not finished till Christ died. We are made nigh by the blood of Jesus. We are *healed*, not at all by His words or deeds, but *by His stripes*.”<sup>2</sup>

Law is stern and uncompliant. It “ought to be severe and awful too, or it will excite nothing but contempt”. By the suffering of death, Christ satisfied the demands of the law and gave to the troubled conscience ground of hope. Now no justification is more perfect than that of sinners who believe in

<sup>1</sup>Taken, slightly edited, from the volume, *The Rock of Our Salvation*. Last month’s extract, dealt with God’s wisdom in “the choice of His incarnate Son as the Redeemer”.

<sup>2</sup>Nevins (the quotation is not further identified by Plumer, Ed).

Jesus. Though without the shedding of blood there is no remission, yet by the shedding of Christ's blood there is no lack of forgiveness. He who poured out His soul unto death is exalted a Prince and Saviour to grant both repentance and remission of sins. Thus is God's wisdom displayed in Christ's sufferings. The law is magnified, the sinner is saved.

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## Obituary

### **Mr James A Falconer, Larne**

With the death of Mr James A Falconer on 27 November 2004, the Larne Congregation of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland lost a member and deacon whose life revolved around the Cause and who devoted himself energetically to any practical measure for its maintenance and strengthening.

Born in January 1936, Mr Falconer professed faith and became a member of the Methodist Church while in his teens. His love for the Word of God, and his readiness to follow out the leadings of its truth as he became increasingly acquainted with it, were such that he took a stand against the progress of modernism and ecumenism within that body and came out from it when his protests were unavailing. He was identified from the beginning with the separate congregation formed in Larne in October 1977 under the ministry of Rev G G Hutton, and was happy to be one of its representatives at the Synod of May 1988, when it was received into the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Through him and his instrumentality, the church building in Larne was fitted up with the minimum cost to the congregation.

No doubt Mr Falconer's unwillingness to undertake the office of elder was largely accounted for by the fact that he was very much a private person with regard to spiritual experience and was conscious that his spiritual gifts were not such as qualified him to lead in public worship. While he did not consider himself gifted in public prayer, his prayers revealed his simple, unquestioning trust and his love for the Saviour and for the souls of his fellow sinners. When he was physically able, he enjoyed leading the praises of the congregation and even in his latter weakness, when it was occasionally necessary for him to present, one would conclude from his demeanour that he sang with grace in the heart, making melody to the Lord (Eph 5:19, Col 3:16).

It was in the practical realm behind the scenes that his whole-hearted devotion to the Lord, His Word and His Cause revealed itself. As Treasurer (since 1977), Deacon (since 1980), and Clerk of Deacons' Court, he looked after the material affairs of the congregation diligently and thoroughly. Successive interim-moderators and Sabbath supplies have known the lengths

to which he went to ensure that they were left without concern as to their journeys and their sojourn in Larne, and he and his like-minded wife showered hospitality on those who came to supply the pulpit or visit the congregation. Those who knew him best recognised in him a man firm in his own convictions and ready to act upon them whatever the personal consequences, loyal to those whom he considered were contending uncompromisingly for the faith, ready to stand alone when required, simple and honest in his approach to everything and a typically straight-speaking Ulsterman. Yet he thought the best even of those whose conduct might cause him hurt.

He was widely known and respected in the community, as a business man and as a Christian, as was evident from the attendance at his funeral to Larne Cemetery on Wednesday, 1 December 2004. In the absence of a pastor and with the incapacitating illness of the local elder, Mr Thomson, he endeavoured in many quiet ways to show pastoral care for the congregation and especially for the children. Encouraged when people came, he was discouraged when people left the congregation. Appreciative of all that was done by Scottish and local supply, he longed for the settlement of a pastor, believing that this was necessary for consolidation and growth, especially in the isolation of the congregation from the rest of the Church.

Suffering latterly from a variety of physical complaints, any one of which most people would have found disabling, Mr Falconer was free from repining and regarded his troubles as difficulties to be overcome by grace in the performance of his duties rather than as excuses for not performing these duties. No doubt he was sustained from the same resources as were made known to the Apostle: "And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

Mr Falconer was at home in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, ready as he was to accept whatever he was persuaded was in accordance with the Word of God, and he desired that the particular testimony of the Church be maintained and extended in Ulster. He valued communication with an extensive circle of friends in the Church in Scotland, though not able to visit in recent years. Many will unite in expressing sincere sympathy with Mrs Falconer, their two sons and daughter, the grandchildren and the surviving brother, in their sad loss. The Lord's people will also be mindful of their brethren in Larne and pray that the heart's desire of our departed friend and of those remaining in the congregation will yet be granted and that the Lord will provide a pastor and be pleased to build up His Cause among them. "When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer" (Ps 102:16,17).

*(Rev) Hugh M Cartwright*

## Book Review

***John Owen on the Lord's Supper***, by Jon D Payne, published by The Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 249 pages, £15.95, available from the F P Bookroom.

This book by a Presbyterian minister in Georgia, USA, consists of two parts. In the first there is a brief outline of the life of John Owen (1616-83), "The Pastor Theologian", followed by an analysis of his theology of the Lord's Supper and concluding with an introduction to his discourses at the Lord's Supper between 1669 and 1682 and a few remarks by way of summary and conclusions. This first part, including various bibliographies, occupies pages 1 to 88. The second part of the book, pages 91 to 249, consists of a republication of Owen's 25 sacramental discourses, which were published after his death and can be found in volume 9 of his *Works*.

Dr Payne discusses the differences between the first Reformers regarding the relation of the bread and the cup in the Lord's Supper to the body and blood of Christ. He summarises (1) the view of Luther that the body and blood of Christ are objectively present with the elements in the sacrament (consubstantiation), (2) the view of Zwingli (at least in its earlier form) that the sacrament is but a symbolic memorial of Christ's death, and (3) the view of John Calvin (and Peter Martyr) that "the signs and the things signified must be distinguished without being separated" (p 24) and that "the sacraments were external signs which were means of internal grace when accompanied by the Spirit and God-given faith" (p 26).

Owen's position, like that of the Puritans generally, is shown to be in line with that of Calvin, summarised nowhere better than in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 30: The Lord's Supper is "only a commemoration of that one offering up of Himself, by Himself, upon the cross. . . . Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death: the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses." Drawing upon the hints scattered throughout Owen's writings, Dr Payne illustrates his claim that, in his sacramental teaching, Owen concentrated particularly on Christ set forth in the Supper, faith exercised in the use of the Supper and nourishment and strength derived from Christ through the Supper.

In his introduction to Owen's discourses, Payne suggests that among their more prominent themes are the importance of solemn preparation, God's

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covenant love displayed in the Supper, substitutionary atonement and divine propitiation, and the special profession made by the communicant. The discourses are addresses just prior to partaking of the Supper, intended to provide communicants with “a suitable subject for . . . present meditation” (p 91), “to give occasion to that particular exercise of faith which is now required of us” (p 202), “to whet our minds and lead us to a particular exercise of faith and love in this duty” (p 205). “That which we are to endeavour in this ordinance is to get a view by faith – faith working by thoughts, by meditation, acting by love – a view of Christ as lifted up; that is, as bearing our iniquities in His own body on the tree” (p 204). Many of the discourses take up only three or four pages.

The first part of this book should provoke much-needed thought regarding the significance and use of the Lord’s Supper – a right and spiritual understanding of which can only promote in the Lord’s people a more beneficial and God-glorifying communicating. The prayerful and thoughtful reading of one of Owen’s discourses as part of preparation for a Communion Sabbath might, with the Lord’s blessing, help promote a frame of soul suited to participation in this holy ordinance. The book is commended to those who feel their need of help in these areas and are prepared to reflect on what they read.

*(Rev) Hugh M Cartwright*

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## Protestant View

### New Evidence on Wartime Pope

*The Jewish Week*, a New York newspaper, reports that Abraham Foxman, a Polish Jew, was left in the care of his nursemaid by his parents when they fled from the Nazis. She tenderly cared for him and had him “baptised as a Catholic”, under the name Henrik Kurpi (using her own surname).

His parents survived the war and were reunited with him. However, the nursemaid refused to give him up to them, claiming that the child now “belonged to her and the Catholic Church”. Eventually his parents took possession of their child by kidnapping him, but were mystified by her conduct, as was the boy himself at a later date.

He now knows what moved her to do what she did. It was a recently-discovered directive from the Vatican, dated 23 October 1946 and approved by the then pope, Pius XII. It was sent to churches in France, and likely to churches in Poland also, directing that Jewish babies were not to be returned to their parents if they were baptised during the holocaust.

Abraham Foxman did not hold Kurpi’s conduct against her, especially as

she had saved his life and, indirectly, the lives of his parents. However, the discovery of the letter has given fresh ammunition to those who, because of Pius XII's public silence when the Nazis were murdering the Jews of Europe, are opposed to the Vatican's plans to make him a saint. The fact that the letter states, "This decision has been approved by the Holy Father" [Pope Pius XII], confirms that, at the very least, he had knowledge of, and connived at, the destruction of the Jews. Truly "there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets" (Dan 2:28). NMR

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## Notes and Comments

### The Asian Tsunami

Possibly throughout recorded history, no event since Noah's flood has caused such loss of life by drowning as the recent Asian tsunami. That so many of our fellow creatures – present estimates are more than 150 000 – should have perished in so short a time, and in so awful a fashion, was a divine visitation that ought to make men tremble the world over. To rule out the hand of God in this occurrence and explain it simply in terms of a natural phenomenon resulting from a movement in the earth's crust, underneath the ocean floor, is to forget that He is in sovereign control of all events, whether we view them as important or unimportant. If the sparrow falling to the ground is an event noted, and ordered, by Him, how much is this the case when the souls of so many thousands are parted from their bodies – the one part returning to God who gave it and the other returning to the dust from whence it came!

Do not the "keys of hell (that is, the invisible world in general as well as the place of woe) and of death" hang from His girdle? As James Buchanan points out (*Comfort in Affliction*, Meditation 8), the power of the keys is absolute; it is a "royal prerogative". "We learn from Scripture", he writes, "that the whole of that vast world is divided into two departments, and only two – heaven and hell; and betwixt the two a great gulf is fixed – an impassable gulf of separation. But separated as they are, Christ reigns over both; and when He says, 'I have the keys of the invisible world', He asserts His dominion over all the spirits that have ever passed from this world, either into heaven or hell, and His absolute control over them in their final destination of happiness or woe. When it is affirmed that He has also 'the key of death', it is plainly implied that no spirit can pass out of this present world without His permission or appointment; and, more generally, that He is Lord of the living not less than of the dead, and has a thorough control over everything that can in any way affect the lives of men. An absolute power

over death necessarily presupposes a corresponding power over life and its affairs; and it is by the exercise of His providence in sustaining life that He fulfils His purpose as to the time and the mode of their departure hence." Surely this is a time for the "inhabiters of the earth" to be still and to know that He is God!

The questions which arise in the minds of men after such events usually terminate on God; the most common is: Why, if there is a God, does He permit such events, which entail so much human suffering and distress? To pose such a question savours of atheism and unholy presumption; it casts a reflection upon God and is a question that no one who fears Him would ever ask. The answer is that He has His own holy ends in view and "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" We know that "to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" and that "He does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men".

Does He not reveal the reason why, in the days of Noah, He brought in the flood upon "the world of the ungodly" and, later on, why He rained fire and brimstone from heaven upon Sodom, where they were "wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly"? Do not worldliness, materialism, hedonism, uncleanness and pleasure-seeking characterise our own generation to a great extent and does not this solemn visitation in providence remind us that He remains the same God still? "No calamity happens, except through God" is Calvin's paraphrase of the scripture: "Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord has not done it?" He further adds, "So also here the Prophet teaches that men are chastised by God whenever anything adverse happens to them, as though He said that fortune rules not, as the world imagines, and that things do not take place at random; but that God is at all times the judge of the world". In other words, He is no idle spectator of what is happening here in time and He treats men with "sharpness and severity" in order that they "may know their vices".

Some of the places most affected by this tsunami attracted pleasure-seekers from all over the world. It has to be noted that the wave arrived on the Lord's Day, the day that God has set apart to be observed the world over by a holy resting from all employments and recreations that are lawful on other days. We cannot but fear that it found multitudes unprepared for the eternity into which they were ushered so suddenly and without warning.

There is much sorrow over those who perished and much sympathy for those that survived, especially for the bereaved and the destitute – and rightly so. But, as far we are able to judge, there has been, as yet, little acknowle-

ment of the hand of God in the matter and no evidence of repentance. But none of us hearing of the Asian tsunami has reason to be complacent. We would be wise to remember what the Saviour said to those who told Him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices and of the eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell. Were these Galileans, or those who perished at Siloam, sinners above all others because they suffered such things? Christ answered: "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." JM

### **The US President's Need of God**

We were glad to read one of President Bush's more recent public statements about Christianity; he told the *Washington Times*: "I don't see how you can be president – at least from my perspective – without a relationship with the Lord." Yet, sadly, Mr Bush's Christian profession does not square with many of his other acts and utterances. Various news items show that he is a religious liberal, who says that Christians worship the same God as Muslims do; his home church in Austin, Texas, "welcomes gay couples" and has many members who "support abortion rights".

However, even the defective acknowledgement he has made, as President of the USA, amounts to an honouring of God which, we believe, God will honour in some degree. Even certain ungodly kings of Israel were helped when they humbled themselves, albeit temporally, before God. For example, although Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, was most certainly not a godly man, "the Lord hearkened unto him . . . and the Lord gave Israel a saviour" when he "besought the Lord".

We long to see the day when national leaders, including those of the UK, will acknowledge openly, even although imperfectly, their need of divine aid in their weighty responsibility to govern wisely. Better still will be the fulfilment of the promise, "Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers" (Is 49:23). NMR

### **Blasphemous BBC Programme**

Despite receiving nearly 50 000 complaints about screening the vile musical, *Jerry Springer: The Opera*, the BBC went ahead with it. Press reports indicate that the show not only contains a very large number of obscenities but is also most blasphemous. A measure of the moral corruption in the BBC is the remark of its director general, Mark Thompson, who said, "I am a practising Christian but there is nothing in this which I believe to be blasphemous". The BBC would not dare to show a programme deriding the gods of other religions, but it arrogantly and maliciously denigrates the

true God, Christ and Christianity, and thinks it can do so with impunity.

It was encouraging that so many complaints were lodged with the BBC and with OFCOM, the media regulator. It was also remarkable that a considerable number of Christians from various Churches and Christian organisations, particularly Christian Voice, protested outside several BBC centres. While we cannot agree with certain tactics of a few of these protesters, the press is taking notice. Their protest has moved *The Daily Telegraph*, for example, to ask, “Have decades of religious apathy been washed away in a single week? Are slumbrous ranks of Christian soldiers marching onward again?”

May we never cease to make our voices heard when the honour of Christ and His cause is besmirched – and may we look to God for strength and wisdom to do so. The Psalmist heard the call of God and asked, “Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? Or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?” (Ps 94:16). At the same time he acknowledged, “Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence” (Ps 94:17).

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## Church Information

### Committee Meetings

These Synod committees will meet, DV, in Inverness Free Presbyterian Church as follows:

#### **Monday, March 21:**

7.00 Ad-hoc Committee on Children and Vulnerable Adults

#### **Tuesday, March 22:**

9.30 - 11.00 Training of the Ministry Committee

11.00 - 12.00 Magazines Committee

12.00 - 1.00 Sabbath Observance Committee

2.00 - 5.00 Finance Committee

2.00 - 3.00 Outreach Committee

3.00 - 4.00 Religion and Morals Committee

6.00 - 7.30 Publications and Bookroom Committee

7.30 - 8.30 Welfare of Youth Committee

8.30 - 9.30 Dominions and Overseas Committee

(Rev) *John MacLeod*, Clerk of Synod

### Meetings of Presbytery

**Skye:** At Portree, on Tuesday, February 8, at 11 am.

**Northern:** At Dingwall, on Tuesday, February 22, at 2 pm.

**Southern:** At Glasgow, on Wednesday, February 23, at 5 pm.

**Zimbabwe:** At Bulawayo, on Tuesday, March 8, at 11 am.

**Western:** At Laide, on Tuesday, March 8, at 6 pm.

**Outer Isles:** At Stornoway, on Tuesday, 15 March, at 1 pm.

#### Bookroom Fund

By appointment of Synod, the special collection on behalf of the Bookroom Fund is due to be taken in congregations during February.

*R A Campbell, General Treasurer*

## Acknowledgement of Donations

**The General Treasurer** acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

*Bookroom Fund:* M MacKenzie, £10 per KJH.

*College & Library Fund:* Anon, USA, \$250; \$51; \$100; D Ayers, London, £50; A Friend, Newcastle, Is 26:3-4, £40.

*Eastern Europe Fund:* J & E R, £150.

*Home Mission Fund:* J & E R, £200.

*Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* J & E R, £200; Anon, USA, \$244.

*Sustentation Fund:* J & E R, £200.

**Congregational Treasurers** acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

**Edinburgh:** *Congregational Funds:* Welsh Friend, £100 per Rev HMC.

**Glasgow:** *Bus Fund:* Anon, £10; £100; £50; £10; Mr DMC, £10; The estate of the late Miss Johnina Campbell, £1000 per McSherry Halliday, Solicitors. *Congregational Funds:* Anon, for Communion Expenses, £40; The estate of the late Mr Ian MacDonald, £8450.49 per General Treasurer. *Eastern Europe Fund:* Anon, £20; £20; £45; £20; £40; £30; £30; £25; £30; £20; £40; £25; £30; £25; £20; £30; £25; £15; £40; £30; £30. *Home Mission Fund:* Anon, £100. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, £100; £200; Anon, for Kenya & Zimbabwe Missions, £60; Anon, for Kenya Mission, £50; Anon, for African Missions, £200; Anon, for Zimbabwe Famine Relief Fund, £25; £25. *London Induction:* Anon, £15. *Sustentation Fund:* Anon, £100; £80; £20; Anon, In memory of Allanina Colledge, £200. *Tape Fund:* Anon, £5. *TBS:* Anon, £20; £40; £80; £40; £50; £20.

**Greenock:** *Eastern Europe Fund:* Anon, £40; £50; Mrs DB, £18; £15. *TBS:* Mrs DB, £18; Anon, £40.

**Inverness:** *Bus Fund:* Anon, £40; Mr C MacDonald, £20. *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £40; £20; £20. *Sustentation Fund:* Anon, £1000. *Where Most Needed:* Mr Nigel Pearce, Wales, £100 per Rev GGH.

**Laide:** *Congregational Funds:* A Friend, Where Most Needed, £100; Anon, Where Most Needed, £20; A Friend, Aultbea, £30 per CR; Anon, Laide, £50; A Friend, Kishorn, £20 per Rev DAR. *Eastern Europe Fund:* FC, £50; DAJM, £200; R Kershaw, £140; A Friend, for printing expenses, £32.50; A Friend, £500; Wellington Congregation, £36.31; Anon, £50; Anon, North Tolsta, £9; Anon, £40; Anon, Laide, for Bibles, £20; W Connolly, £100; D & JM, Laide, £20; Anon, £231.06; A Friend, Kirkhill, £100 per Rev DAR; Friends, Edinburgh, £100; A Friend, Edinburgh, £25; A Friend, Aultbea, £20 per CR; Anon, £50; A Friend, £50; A Friend, £100.

**Portree:** *Bus Fund:* J & C, £50. *Door Collection:* A Friend, £15 per SYM. *Sustentation Fund:* A Friend, £30; £20 per SYM. *Where Most Needed:* J & C, £50.

**Staffin:** *Congregational Funds:* A Friend, Staffin, for Minister's car, £60 per Rev WAW.

**Stornoway:** *Manse Expenses:* M & C, Stornoway, £40 per CMK.