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Biblical Spirituality

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Editorial: "Spirituality"–*Caveat Emptor*

Stephen J. Wellum

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Most astute observers of our contemporary culture will acknowledge that "spirituality" is in. One cannot watch the TV, read the newspaper, listen to the radio, or peruse the blogosphere without being confronted with the topic of "spirituality." However what passes today for "spirituality" needs to be stamped with the old Latin phrase, *caveat emptor*—"Let the buyer beware." No doubt, it must be acknowledged that some of the reasons for the rise of spirituality in our day are beneficial. For example, in contrast to a crass philosophical materialism of a previous era and a constant preoccupation with the horizontal, the focus of many on spiritual matters is welcome. However, most of today's discussion regarding "spirituality" is so eclectic and syncretistic that it is imperative that Christians do not confuse contemporary discussions and forms of it with true biblical spirituality. As the old adage goes, "Ideas have consequences," and the ideas surrounding current thought on spirituality, if not grounded in a Christian worldview centered in the gospel, will, in the end, lead to spiritual disaster.

In fact, many people in recent days have made this precise point and probably none better than theologian and cultural critic, David Wells. In his very helpful analysis of the contemporary landscape, especially in his books, *Losing our Virtue* (Eerdmans, 1998) and *Above All Earthly Pow'rs* (Eerdmans, 2005), Wells has argued that, due to a whole host of factors such as modernization, secularization, and even immigration patterns, western society has seen a rise in "spirituality," but spirituality which too often has been uncoupled from the centrality of God in his blazing holiness, Christ and his glorious cross, and the entire truth of God's Word. In this "new spirituality" the focus, unfortunately, is not upon the glory of the triune God, but too often upon the human self; not upon the glory of Christ and the cross, but that which is private, internal, and psychologically driven. In the end, Wells argues, much of today's spirituality is syncretistic, pluralistic, and downright pagan. This is one of the reasons why an incredible number of Americans see themselves as "spiritual" but without any reference to God and especially the God of the Bible. Or, why many view spirituality through a pluralistic lens so that forty-four percent of Americans think that the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon are simply different expressions of the same spiritual truths (*Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 126). Regrettably, even discussion of spirituality in the evangelical world has seen a shift away from how the Scriptures and our forefathers have viewed it. As Christians, if we are not careful, we may end up adopting more of a cultural understanding of spirituality than a biblical one.

This is not a new problem. Interestingly, Francis Schaeffer many years ago wrote his very helpful book, *True Spirituality*, to address this very same issue. In many ways, Schaeffer's work was prophetic in its day. Back in the 1950-60s, he saw a growing interest in what we now know as "spirituality" but he was

very concerned to distinguish a *true* and *biblical* spirituality from its contemporary expression. He acknowledged that this new situation was, no doubt, an opportunity for Christians to present the gospel in all of its depth and breadth, but he was also concerned that Christians evaluate this growing trend towards spirituality through the lens of Scripture. In many ways, *caveat emptor* was his cry: Be careful not to buy into a form of spirituality that may be nothing more than a distortion of the gospel.

One of the reasons why this edition of *SBJT* is devoted to the theme of biblical spirituality is for this very reason: to help Christians think through some of the issues surrounding the current discussion through the lens and grid of Scripture. If we are going to be transformed by the renewing of our minds and not be conformed to this world (Rom 12:1-2); if we are going to speak clearly and powerfully to our generation, we need to think afresh about what Scripture says about the topic of spirituality, as well as learn from those in the faith who have gone before us. With that in mind, our various contributors, both in the articles and Forum selections, will explore a wide-range of material to help us achieve this goal.

Robert Plummer begins our discussion by biblically evaluating the current focus on the very popular and widely practiced spiritual discipline of "silence and solitude." After helpfully examining the biblical basis for this practice, Plummer provides some wise reflections on its role in the Christian life. Graeme Goldsworthy then turns our attention to some very important reflections on a biblical theology of prayer, that which is at the heart of true, biblical spirituality. Goldsworthy, after grounding his discussion of prayer in the doctrine of God, then turns our attention to how we should think of prayer across redemptive-history centered in Jesus Christ. Peter Adam, in contrast to much of contemporary discussions of spirituality, draws our attention to the foundation of biblical spirituality, namely, God's Word. True spirituality, Adam contends, is Word-centered, and his reflections on this subject are especially pertinent for today, given the neglect of this topic in current discussion. Shawn Wright and Michael Haykin respectively provide some very important historical reflections on the subject of spirituality. It is important to recognize that we are not the first Christians to reflect on this subject; we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. Wright's focus is on the sixteenth century theological giant, Theodore Beza, while Haykin reflects on the piety of Baptists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. What both of these articles achieve is the reminder that we neglect the resources of our forefathers in the faith to our peril. Finally, Phil Johnson reminds us that the New Age movement, which has spawned much of the contemporary discussion of spirituality, is still alive and well today, something that the church must not ignore.

It is my prayer that all of our contributors will make us ever vigilant, not only to understand the truth of the gospel, but also to live it out faithfully in our daily lives. May we ever learn afresh "to think God's thoughts after him," for the glory of our great God and Savior and for the good of the church.

Are the Spiritual Disciplines of "Silence and Solitude" Really Biblical?

Robert L. Plummer

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Much recent Christian literature on spiritual disciplines advocates the practices of "silence and solitude" (e.g., *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, by Ruth Haley Barton, InterVarsity, 2004). Scriptural precedents for solitude and silence are given from both Old and New Testament texts (e.g., 1 Kgs 19; Mark 1:35). Such texts, however, usually come from narrative portions of Scripture, and little thought has gone into determining whether the patterns described are normative. Furthermore, other portions of Scripture that seem to speak in a praise-worthy way about a biblical figure's *lack* of solitude and silence go ignored (e.g., Mark 6:32-34; 2 Cor 11:26-27).

Is the evangelical church's increasing adoption of silence and solitude really a return to biblically-sanctioned practices? Or, is the evangelical church simply parroting the secular culture's fascination with Eastern religious meditation and more "holistic" approaches to life management? In answering these questions, this article seeks to provide a balanced, biblical understanding of the spiritual disciplines of "silence and solitude."[1]

Introduction

Within the last twenty years, evangelicals have shown a growing interest in spiritual formation.[2] We have recognized that one can have a stadium-full of people who affirm certain theological propositions, but who demonstrate little fruit of the Spirit. The paraphrased words of James 2:19 seem to apply: "So, you believe in one God—you affirm certain doctrinally orthodox statements? Well, congratulations, you have reached the spiritual maturity level of a demon!"[3]

Numerous books have been written on spiritual disciplines in recent years.[4] I will be using the term "spiritual disciplines" as a shorthand expression for the spiritual practices that Scripture expects of God's people. For example, it is undeniable that there is a scriptural expectation for believers to pray, fast, read Scripture, care for others, evangelize, etc. I will call these practices "spiritual disciplines." A spiritual discipline that has risen to prominence in recent years—but about which there is much disagreement—is the practice of "silence and solitude." At the end of this article, I will be offering a definition and tentative conclusions about silence and solitude, but let us begin with these simple, stripped-down definitions: *Silence is complete quiet for spiritual purposes*. *Solitude is complete aloneness for spiritual purposes*. As much literature discusses these disciplines together, we will continue to speak of them as one practice, though they can, in fact, be separated into two distinct disciplines.

The question that I will address in the remainder of this article is this: Is the practice of "silence and solitude" (or "solitude and silence") built on a firm scriptural expectation that believers will engage in this discipline as a means of experiencing God's grace?

That prominent Christian believers of various backgrounds have found the practice of "silence and solitude" a transforming spiritual experience is undeniable. Contrary to some aspersions, solitude and silence are not just the activities of misguided legalistic ascetics. (Though, they very well *were* and *are* practiced by such persons.) Even the famous Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon enjoins the activity. In his *Lectures to His Students* he writes,

> Time spent in quiet prostration of soul before the Lord is most invigorating. . . . Quietude, which some men cannot abide, because it reveals their inner poverty, is as a palace of cedar to the wise, for along its hallowed courts the King in his beauty designs to walk. . . . Priceless as the gift of utterance may be, the practice of silence in some aspects far excels it. Do you think me a Quaker? Well, be it so. Herein I follow George Fox most lovingly; for I am persuaded that most of us think too much of speech, which after all is but the shell of thought. Quiet contemplation, still worship, unuttered rapture, these are mine when my best jewels are before me. Brethren, rob not your heart of the deep sea joys; miss not the far-down life, by for ever [*sic*] babbling among the broken shells and foaming surges of the shore.[5]

As a teacher of New Testament and Hermeneutics, the question ever before me is not whether famous, orthodox Christians such Charles Spurgeon, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, and Francis Schaeffer practiced "silence and solitude" (they did).[6] Nor, is the question of effectiveness primary for me. The question is a scriptural one—do the Old and New Testament display a clear expectation that persons in relationship with God should regularly practice the spiritual disciplines of "silence and solitude"? Is the practice of "silence and solitude" rightly labeled as a *biblical* spiritual discipline?

Much has been written on silence and solitude in the last twenty years—essays, articles, and some popular monographs. Many of these works provide significant insights, and I will quote from a number of them. Nevertheless, in looking at the literature on this subject, it seems to me that there is a need in our day for a well-written "biblical theology" of silence and solitude, just as we have recently seen some very fine monographs on the biblical theology of prayer or possessions.[7] What I intend to present here is not a full-orbed biblical theology of silence and solitude, but an initial exploratory article. I will be raising five observations and accompanying suggestions that can hopefully be explored in more detail in another setting.

I. Concern for Context

Many works on silence and solitude cite numerous verses that mention aloneness or quietude, but these studies pay little attention to the broader context or authorial intent of the passages cited. In one work on spiritual formation, for example, in a list of devotional verses on silence, the authors included Gen 24:21 ("Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful")[8] and 1 Sam 1:13 ("Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard").[9] In listing numerous verses with little attention to context, scholars are in danger of substituting their predilections for the biblical authors' authority and modeling a poor hermeneutic for readers. If biblical scholars handle the text loosely, what can they expect from those who read their

works? In fact, as we pay close attention to the biblical text, it opens up a beautiful vista of theological reflection on silence and solitude. Rather than flattening all texts that mention silence or aloneness into the basis for a devotional practice, we should note there are many different reasons for silence and solitude in the Scriptures. A brief list would include silence and/or solitude as an expression of or in close association with:

(a) deference to God, especially in his role as judge and sovereign Lord (Job 6:24; Hab 2:20; Zeph 1:7; Rom 3:19)
(b) avoidance of sins of speech (Prov 11:12; James 1:19)
(c) a time to focus on prayer (Matt 6:6; Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18)
(d) physical refreshment (Mark 6:31)
(e) grief (1 Sam 1:13)
(f) ignorance (Matt 22:12)
(g) trust (Ps 131:2; Isa 30:15; Lam 3:26)
(h) punishment (Luke 1:20)
(i) humility and creatureliness (Eccl 5:2)
(j) recognition of life's varied experiences (Eccl 3:7)
(k) demonized despair (Luke 8:29)

In this setting, there is not time to explore this list in detail, but I offer it as evidence that a full-orbed biblical theology of silence and solitude will do much more than provide a basis for a certain mode of devotional retreat.

II. The Interpretation of Historical Narrative

Recent authors advocating silence and solitude frequently appeal to key characters in biblical narrative who spend time alone in silence. Ruth Haley Barton, for example, builds her recent book *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* around the well-known story of Elijah's flight from Jezebel into the wilderness (1 Kgs 19).[10] There are, of course, major interpretive dangers in claiming that the behavior of certain characters in biblical narrative is normative. Where is the hermeneutical justification for seeing this behavior as normative? Sometimes there is hermeneutical justification for seeing a character's actions as normative for the readers, but what are the interpretive guidelines? How do we know that we are not simply picking and choosing the practices we desire as we read through an ancient text? Isaiah was an honored prophet—one of the most quoted in the New Testament. Surely his life was paradigmatic in some way. But, none of us feel the need to wander around naked for three years as a symbolic prophetic oracle (Isa 20:3). Neither, like Ezekiel, will we cook our food over dried animal dung (Ezek 4:15).

Certainly narrative characters can be used as positive or negative paradigms in Scripture, i.e., as examples of how to act *or* how not to act. We should, however, seek clear justification for such claims through clues in the narrative such as editorial comments, repetition, the employment of authoritative speakers, thematic statements and other recognized literary indications.[11] In claiming that certain elements in a historical narrative are normative, we must not only make such assertions, but also justify them with hard evidence.

An example of clear paradigmatic behavior by a character in biblical narrative is the prayer activity of Jesus in Luke's Gospel. Commentators on Luke widely recognize not only the explicit imperatives of Jesus regarding prayer in Luke (e.g., 6:28; 11:2; 18:1-8; 19:46; 21:36; 22:40, 46), but the significant inclusion of exemplary prayer episodes from Jesus' life as a hortatory device (Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18,

28-29; 11:1; 22:32; 22:41-45).[12] As we seek to justify the behavior of certain characters in historical narrative as normative, we need to indicate specific, multiple pieces of evidence. Furthermore, the broader interpretive community can serve as a correction for us if we begin to read our desires or interests into the text. If a quick survey of five major commentaries on a passage does not result in at least one scholar noting the paradigmatic purpose of the behavior in question, then it is unlikely that the debated behavior is normative. The greater the lack of explicit imperatives or expectations regarding silence and solitude in a particular biblical author, the more tentatively we should assert our conclusions regarding these practices. For example, while we have many explicit imperatives regarding prayer in Paul's letters and exemplary prayers from the apostle himself, there is no text in Paul to which one can appeal for an explicit imperative to be alone and quiet for spiritual purposes. It is especially questionable then to assume disciplines of silence and solitude behind Paul's reported travel plans and then project those imagined reasons onto the broader Christian community. Richard Foster in fact does this when he writes,

> The apostle Paul withdrew for thirteen years from the time of his conversion until he began his ministry at Antioch. He probably spent three years in the desert and then approximately ten years in his hometown of Tarsus. During that time he no doubt experienced a lot of solitude. This was followed by a period of very intense activity as Paul carried out his mission to the Gentiles. Paul needed both solitude and activity, and so do we.[13]

More likely, given the Nabatean King Aretas's opposition to Paul mentioned in 2 Cor 11:32, the apostle was likely proclaiming the gospel in Arabia, not to mention Tarsus, as he is reported doing in Damascus immediately after his conversion in Acts (Acts 9:20).

Similar to Foster, Dallas Willard, in *The Spirit of the Disciples*, claims, "John the Baptist, like many forerunners in the prophetic line, was much alone in the deserted places of his land."[14] The closest textual support we have for Willard's statement is Luke 1:80, which reads, "And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel." It seems, however, that the main purpose of this statement is to contrast John's prior pre-ministry private life with his later well-known public ministry. Luke does not tell us what John was doing in the wilderness regions, nor even whether he lived alone. Interestingly, when John the Baptist is depicted in the New Testament, he is almost always with his disciples or preaching to the crowds. For example, Mark 1:5 reads, "The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to [John]. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River." This hardly sounds like a retreat of silence and solitude. Did John have such a solitary lifestyle? Possibly. But where is the evidence? Other scholars have suggested that John hailed from an Essene commune.[15] An advocate for communal Christian living could cite John in a similarly fallacious argument from silence.

III. Concepts, Not Mere Words

In some studies on silence and solitude, authors have a too narrow linguistic focus. In other words, it appears that they have done a concordance search on a limited number of words like "aloneness" and

"silence," but have failed to include other material that should be included within the *concept* of silence and solitude. This is a linguistic fallacy. To deduce properly and thoroughly the Scripture's teaching on silence and solitude, we must not only deal with a truncated list of words, but ideas.

One example of a theme that might be fruitfully explored under the broader concept of silence and solitude is that of Sabbath rest or Festival holidays in the Old Testament. Leaving behind daily responsibilities for times of refreshment and worship is at the heart of Old Testament festival and Sabbath regulations (e.g., Lev 23). This seems to me a fruitful line of inquiry that has not been explored sufficiently.

An illustration from an unrelated New Testament study will illustrate the point. In the Gospel of John, nowhere does it say believers are to "obey" (*hypakouō*) God. Should we conclude, then, that John did not expect believers to obey God? Of course not! They are to "keep" (*tēreō*) his word (John 8:51); they are to "keep" (*tēreō*) his commands (John 14:15). In fact, none of the Johannine writings (the Johannine epistles, Revelation, Gospel of John) contain the word *hypakouō*. If we focus on particular words rather than concepts, we can be led astray.[16]

IV. The Danger of Selective Use of Biblical Data

In studies of silence and solitude, there is a neglect of apparent contradictory voices in Scripture. Texts are ignored which seem to laud a lifestyle not of silence and solitude, but communication and community. Such texts remind us that there is a complexity to this topic that cannot be resolved by using a few narrative texts as paradigms or by citing a litany of proof texts. For example in 2 Cor 11:26-28, Paul reports on his apostolic way of life:

> I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. *I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep*; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, *I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches*.[17]

Clearly, Paul needs to take a spiritual retreat of silence and solitude. He is wearing himself too thin! He thinks the spiritual life of the churches depend on him rather than trusting in the sovereign God.

Or, is it possible for a deep, praiseworthy, even paradigmatic spirituality to be modeled by one who labors and toils and goes without sleep, who is constantly worn down under the pressure of his personal feeling of responsibility for others' spiritual health?

Mark 6:31-32 is often cited in literature on solitude and silence.[18] The text reads,

> Then, because so many people were coming and going that [Jesus and his disciples] did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

But, what of the following two verses, Mark 6:33-34?

> But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep

> without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

The spiritual retreat, so to speak, was cancelled because of the pressing need of sheep lacking a shepherd. Like all major themes in Scripture, silence and solitude cannot be reduced to a flat two-dimensional concept. To understand properly silence and solitude, one must discuss apparently contradictory passages in Scripture that present communication and community as spiritual priorities. In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us, "[O]ne who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation and despair."[19]

Similarly, in critiquing the lifestyle of the Desert Fathers, Martin Shelley queries,

> How can you learn to love if no one else is around? How can you learn humility living alone? How can you learn kindness or gentleness or goodness in isolation? How can you learn patience unless someone puts yours to the test? . . . As attractive as solitary sanctification may seem, it is life amid people, busyness, and interruptions that develop many of the qualities God requires.[20]

V. The Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture

While there are rich and varied materials in the Bible that touch on themes of silence, speech, aloneness, and community, Christian scholars have too readily appealed to non-Christian traditions. Rather than drawing from the deep well of biblical revelation, scholars have run too quickly to others. It is not that one can gain no insights by comparative religious study or knowledge of the human condition through considering non-Christian practices of silence and solitude. Yet, such comparison is only appropriate and worthwhile after having exhausted God's unique and authoritative revelation in his Word. For example, the devotional search for a complete emptiness of mind in times of retreat finds more basis in Transcendental Meditation than in the Scriptures.[21] Even authors who affirm biblical authority can spend a large percentage of literary space quoting the examples of great saints while spending little time with actual biblical texts. If the Bible is not our basis for understanding the concepts of silence and solitude and how they relate to spirituality, we will be in danger of adopting non-Christian religious practices or others' experiences as the basis for our supposed Christian spirituality.

The words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer again provide a needed reminder here. He writes,

> There is an indifferent, or even negative, attitude toward silence which sees in it a disparagement of God's revelation in the Word. This is the view which misinterprets silence as a ceremonial gesture, a mystical desire to get beyond the Word. This is to miss the essential relationship of silence to the Word. Silence is the simple stillness of the individual under the Word of God. We are silent before hearing the Word because our thoughts are already directed to the Word, as a child is quiet when he enters his father's room. We are silent after hearing the Word because the Word is still speaking and dwelling within us. We are silent at the beginning of the day because God should have the first word, and we are silent before going to sleep because the last word also belongs to God. We keep silence solely for the sake of the Word, and therefore not in order to show disregard for the Word but rather to honor and receive it.[22]

Conclusions

In this exploratory article, I have writ-

ten on the practice of silence and solitude from the perspective of a New Testament professor. Among other things, I have argued for a more thoughtful interpretive method that allows the varied biblical references to silence and solitude to shape our understanding of these concepts. Specifically, in this brief article, we are seeking to know how the practices of silence and solitude relate to biblical spiritual disciplines. It seems to me that silence and solitude should not be thought of as spiritual disciplines in and of themselves. They are conditions that aid in the practice of spiritual disciplines such as prayer and biblical meditation. The danger of thinking of silence and solitude as disciplines in themselves could lead to a focus on the absence of noise or absence of other persons to the neglect of the actual biblical purpose for that absence. There is no doubt that silence and solitude aid the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible meditation, but, in my opinion, they should not be thought of as actual disciplines in themselves.

Thus, even though Don Whitney classifies silence and solitude as spiritual disciplines, his definitions for these practices seem to be accurate. He defines solitude as "voluntarily and temporary abstention from speaking *so that certain spiritual goals might be sought*" (my emphasis). And he defines silence as "the voluntary and temporary abstention from speaking *so that certain spiritual goals might be sought*" (my emphasis).[23] Note the explicit statement of [biblical] spiritual goals that accompanies both of Whitney's definitions.

One would be harder pressed to prove my next point from Scripture, but it also appears that silence and solitude are environmental conditions that aid the healthy emotional and physiological state of most humans. Just as the human body is replenished through sleep, food, water, and air, it seems that God has designed humans such that most, if not all, function better as persons after having experienced intermittent times of silence and solitude. Thus, many persons from non-Christian religions and even persons speaking from a completely non-spiritual perspective experience a sense of happiness and fulfillment from times of silence and solitude. Scores of quotes from non-Christian writers could be marshaled to demonstrate this phenomenon.[24]

From a biblical perspective, however, these times of human replenishment are best used not for human diversion or entertainment, but for the glory of God through prayer, meditation, worship and other biblically-sanctioned behavior.

There are seasons of sleeplessness and seemingly incessant activity that accompany the lives of those seeking to serve God and love his people (Mark 6:33-34; 2 Cor 11:26-28). It appears, however, that these activity-packed periods are only for seasons. Arguably, time apart in silence and solitude stores up emotional and spiritual strength for times of great trial. In Mark 9:29, Jesus states that some demons can only be driven out only after sufficient preparatory prayer. The disciples could not cast out the demon because "This kind can come out only by prayer." Some great feats of spiritual victory require many hours of preparation.

There remains a danger of thinking that simply aloneness or quietude can result in spiritual fortitude. This is not so, as is amply illustrated by Hannah More in a letter to John Newton, dated 1787. In this missive from her summer hermitage, she writes,

> I have always fancied that if I could secure to myself a quiet retreat as I have now really accomplished that I should be wonderfully good; that I should have leisure to store my mind with such and such maxims of wisdom; that I would be safe from such and such temptations; that, in short, my whole summers would be smooth periods of grace and goodness.
>
> Now the misfortune is, I have actually found a great deal of comfort I expected, but without any of the concomitant virtues. I am certainly happier here than in the agitation of the world, but I do not find that I am one bit better.[25]

In some ways, we can think of silence and solitude as analogous to fasting, though fasting is best thought of as a distinct spiritual discipline.[26] There are undeniable health benefits from fasting, just as there are undeniable psychological benefits from times of silence and solitude. Fasting without a conscious focus on God, however, is not biblical fasting. Likewise, times of solitude and silence for the Christian are not for a mental or emotional boost, but acts of worship where one's focus can be placed unwaveringly on the gracious God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

With an eye to application, evangelicals might ask themselves what is accomplished in so-called spiritual retreats filled with frenetic activity and endless socialization. How might spiritual retreats be structured in such a way so that times of aloneness and silence lead to a deeper encounter of God and his Word?

Though we cannot endorse Thomas Merton's syncretistic spirituality, we can agree with him that we, as busy ministers, must not become

> Men dedicated to God whose lives are full of restlessness and have no real desire to be alone. They admit that exterior solitude is good, in theory . . . but in practice, their lives are devoured by activities and strangled with attachments . . . Solitude is impossible for them. They fear it. They do everything they can to escape it. What is worse, they try to draw everyone else into activities as senseless and devouring as their own.[27]

ENDNOTES

[1]This essay was originally delivered as an oral address at the 57th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Valley Forge, PA, November 2005.

[2]E.g., see Bruce Demarest, S*atisfy Your Soul: Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999); Richard J. Foster, ed., *The Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005); M. Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993).

[3]I recall reading a similar paraphrase in a modern commentary on James, but I have been unable to locate the text.

[4]E.g., Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005); Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991); Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (rev. ed.; New York: HarperCollins, 1988); Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (repr., New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

[5]C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 51.

[6]Jonathan Edwards writes, "True religion disposes persons to be much alone in solitary places, for holy meditation and prayer" (*On Religious Affections* in *Works*

[vol. 2; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, (1834) 1974], 312). Francis Schaeffer writes, "I walked in the mountains when it was clear and when it was rainy I walked backward and forward in the hayloft of the old chalet in which we lived. I walked, prayed, and thought through what the Scriptures taught as well as reviewing my own reasons for being a Christian" (*True Spirituality* [Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1971], ix). John Owen writes, "A second season calling for the exercise of our minds in thoughts of the omnipresence and omniscience of God is made up of our solitudes and retirements. These give us the most genuine trials whether we are spiritually minded or no. What we are in them, that we are, and no more" (*The Works of John Owen* [vol. 7; ed. William H. Goold; Johnstone & Hunter, 1850-53; repr., Banner of Truth Trust, 1965], 375). Robert Lewis Dabney writes, "Time must be allowed in sacred seasons for divine truth to steep the heart with its influence. Our hurry and externality has impoverished our graces. Solitude is essential to the health of the soul. Is not our modern life far too hurried?" (*Discussions of Robert Lewis Dabney*, vol 1 [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982], 653).

[7]See D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999). Peter Adams has written a helpful book on biblical spirituality, but he does not focus specifically on our topic (Peter Adams, *Hearing God's Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality* [New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2004]).

[8]English Bible quotations are from the New International Version (NIV).

[9]Foster, ed., *The Renovare Spiritual Formation Study Bible*, 2312.

[10]Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004).

[11]See Robert H. Stein's discussion of interpreting narrative in *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing By the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 151-67.

[12]For example, Darrell L. Bock, commenting on themes in Luke, writes, "Prayer is noted by exhortation and example" (*Luke 1:1-9:50* [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994], 41).

[13]Richard Foster, "Solitude" in *Practical Christianity* (ed. Lavonne Nef; Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1986), 305.

[14]Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 101.

[15]Everett Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 492.

[16]Christopher W. Cowan attacks this linguistic fallacy in "The Father and Son in the Fourth Gospel: Johannine Subordination Revisited," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 (2006): 127-28.

[17]My emphasis.

[18]E.g., Foster, ed., *The Renovare Spiritual Formation Study Bible*, 2314.

[19]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (trans. John W. Doberstein; New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 78.

[20]Martin Shelley, "From the Editors," *Leadership* 14, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 3. Stendhal writes, "One can acquire everything in solitude—except character" (*The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations* [ed. Frank S. Mead; Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1965], 411).

[21]Unfortunately, Thomas Merton seems to display such tendencies throughout his writings. See, for example, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (rev. ed.; New York: New Directions, 1972).

[22]Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 79.

[23]Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 184. Whitney also writes, "One reason why the dual Disciplines of silence and solitude can be so thoroughly transforming is because they can help us with the other Spiritual Disciplines" (ibid., 194). Richard Foster also qualifies his discussion of silence: "Simply to refrain from talking, without a heart listening to God, is not silence" (*Celebration of Discipline*, 86).

[24]See, for example, Michele McCormick, "We're Too Busy for Ideas," *Newsweek*, 29 March 1993, 10; Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden: An Annotated Edition* (ed. Water Harding; New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995).

[25]David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 441.

[26]Note Jesus' explicit expectation of fasting in Matt 9:15; Mark 2:20; and Luke 5:35 (parallel passages).

[27]Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, as quoted by Steve Nickels, "Into the Silence," *Leadership* 26, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 47.

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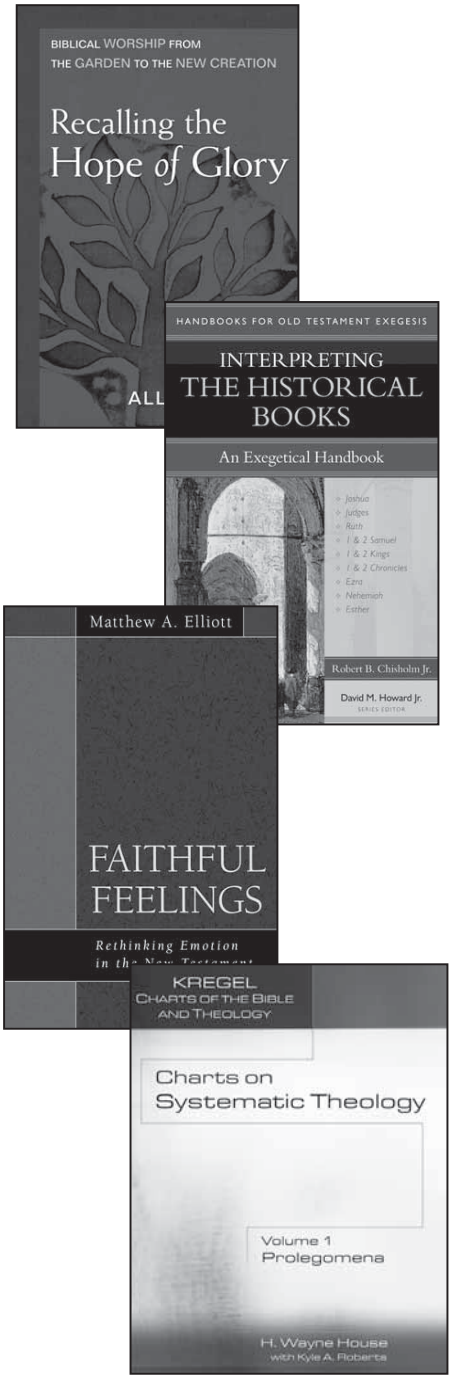

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A Biblical-Theological Perspective on Prayer[1]

Graeme Goldsworthy

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Introduction

I do not much like the word *spirituality* for two related reasons. First, it is not a biblical term which, of course, is not in itself a fatal objection. We have many theological words (e.g., *trinity*) that are not found in the Bible but which nevertheless stand us in good stead. But a word like *trinity* is ancient and has been honed by theological debate and given a shape agreed upon by church councils. *Spirituality*, at least in its modern usage, is a word of doubtful parentage, and there is no agreed orthodox meaning.

Second, the word *spirituality* has been hijacked by all and sundry.[2] It means anything people want it to mean, and its usage is so diffuse and diverse as to render it practically meaningless until pinned down by some clear definition—which it seldom is. It does seem that the further people get from the biblical revelation and the doctrines of the gospel, the more likely they are to use the term *spirituality* to refer to some vague religious or mystical feeling. Often it seems to mean nothing more than a sense of the aesthetic, a feeling of belonging within nature, or an intensified sense of self-worth. It is a rejection of the hard-nosed scientism of the twentieth century that cannot admit to the inexplicable. Rather than add one more definition to the many that exist, either explicitly or implicitly, I prefer not to use the word and look for some more biblical way to speak of the realities of the spiritual life particularly as they relate to prayer. By the spiritual life, of course, I mean the Christian life as defined by the New Testament.

Prayer lies at the heart of what a lot of people refer to as *spirituality*. It is as diffuse as the term itself in that it belongs to everyone. It lies at the heart of religion in whatever form it comes. Prayer seems to be the instinct of all human beings even when it is almost totally neglected or called upon only in the direst of circumstances. Because prayer is a universal phenomenon we, as Christians, should try very hard to understand what it is about, and why it pervades all cultures and religions. But, because it is universal, the Christian pastor and teacher will find many problems and misconceptions about prayer even among the people of God, let alone among the unbelievers. This is partly because many Christians will have their ideas of prayer shaped by various influences that are not necessarily biblical.

Unfortunately, the subject of prayer has not always been dealt with well in the Christian literature. Furthermore, most of us will have heard sermons, convention talks, or Bible studies, that seem to imply or focus on our defective practices of prayer including how undisciplined we are, how lazy, and how lacking in resolve. The effect is to make us feel both guilt and discouragement. A terrible legalism seems to surround the subject of prayer. We are cajoled with examples of the great saints like Luther or Spurgeon who, it is said,

regarded two hours a day in prayer as the norm. We will hear sermons on prayer that remind us that Jesus got up very early while it was still dark and went into a solitary place to pray (Mark 1:35). There is no biblical indication that he prayed this early in the day as a regular habit, but the application is predictably made: if Jesus needed to get up before dawn to pray, how much more do we.

It may be good method to start with our problems, to scratch where it itches so to speak, and then to seek a solution. But legalism and emotional blackmail are not the way. A spiritual "big brother" of mine many years ago said to me, "If you want to get your theology right, always start with God and work down to us." Sound wisdom! So, as Arthur Pink says,

> In the great majority of books written, and in the sermons preached upon prayer, the human element fills the scene almost entirely. It is the conditions which we must meet, the promises we must claim, the things we must do, in order to get our requests granted; and *God's* claim, *God's* right, *God's* glory are often disregarded.[3]

In what follows, I want to approach the subject from God's end. In giving this article the title that indicates a biblical-theological perspective, I do not want to suggest that this can be achieved without a broader theological perspective. Biblical and systematic theology belong together in that neither can be done properly without the other. They are interdependent disciplines. However we look at it, the theology of prayer is largely neglected in the literature. Instead, the practice of prayer, the power of prayer, the imperatives of prayer, and the potential of prayer all seem to predominate. It is time to take a different approach; one that will lead to encouragement and greater devotion to the God who is pleased to allow us to call him "Our Father."

The Foundations of Speech

A simple definition of prayer is that it is speaking to God. But why is it a universal instinct that we want to speak to some superior or divine being? The obvious answer is that such being is more powerful than we are! Paul reminds us that even in the situation of suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18) sinners continue to call upon and worship their alternate gods (Rom 1:25). They may worship the creature rather than the Creator, but they still pray. This raises for many the question of whether God listens to the prayers of pagans, or Muslims, or Hindus, or Buddhists. Does God hear any non-Christian who shoots a despairing word to "the Man upstairs"? And if he hears anyone's prayers, what sort of prayers are acceptable to him?

It may seem to be stating the obvious to say that God is a speaking God. He created all things by a word. Why a word? Why not a thought or a (metaphorical) snap of the fingers? We can say with certainty that he chose both to create and to communicate with his creation by his spoken word. If there is a discernible reason for this word-centered activity of God, it lies in the fact that it is his attribute to be a speaking God. That is, just as it is God's nature that he is Trinity, uni-plurality, so it is his nature that within the "community" of the Trinity (and here we struggle for words that will not mislead) there is communication by word. Vern Poythress has referred to this in his Trinitarian approach to hermeneutics as an essential consideration when thinking about human word communication.[4] The Trinity is eternally, ontologically com-

munal and communicating before ever there were human beings to speak to. The fact that God's speech is not formed by air passing over vocal chords does not change anything. The essence of language is not vibrating air. Such communication, both intra-Trinitarian and in humans as created in the image of God, is not merely instinctive. It is rational. It is integral to personhood.

We have probably all been in the social situation where we speak to someone and they snub us, refusing to acknowledge that we spoke to them. We count it an insult if someone turns their back to us instead of responding to our address. Why then do we wonder at the wrath of God revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Rom 1:18), even when they go on being "religious"? Our common instinct as those created in the image of God is to respond with a word—to pray. But, as rebels, we turn our back on the Creator and address the creature. Religion, then, is not mankind seeking God. Rather it is the expression of our rebellion against him—our determination to snub him and to address substitutes that we mold in our own image.

Speech begins with the ontological Trinity as the Father addresses the Son and Spirit and they address each other and the Father in turn. Consistent with this is the biblical assertion that God speaks his "let us" words into nothingness and creates all that exists. He speaks into the chaos and creates the ordered universe. He then speaks into this ordered universe and creates its ruler in his own image. Finally, he speaks to the humans and orders their relationships with every thing that exists. After this there are only two ways that God speaks to us: first in judgment against human rebellion and second in grace as a plan of salvation is revealed by prophetic word.

It is against this theological backdrop that we must seek to understand prayer. Our first task will be to try to understand the role of the Trinity in prayer.

The Trinity and Prayer

If we are examining the roles of the persons of the Trinity in prayer, it may seem logical to start with God the Father. But there is another logic to the gospel in that our spiritual life begins subjectively with our being subdued by the gospel of Christ. Thus, God speaks to us by the word of his incarnate Word. We are converted by the message about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus *for* us. Faith in Christ has its primary expression in prayer. It begins with our looking to Christ, and then faith grows as we receive the word of Christ and respond in prayer and godly living in the world.

It is at this point that certain problems arise for many. They are persistent problems that demand pastoral care and nurture. Why should we have confidence that God hears our prayers? How does the pastor counsel the Christians who do not feel that their prayers go anywhere or achieve anything? What is the meaning of the signing-off phrases that are handed down from one generation to the next as the acceptable way to conclude a prayer; phrases like, "through Jesus Christ our Lord," or "we pray these things in the name of Jesus," or "for Jesus' sake we pray"?

The Basis of All Prayer: The Sonship of Jesus.

If God made us to hear his word and to respond to it both in word and action, it follows that prayer is an impulse created

in us by God. We can say, then, that prayer belongs to the children of God because they are made in the image of God. But we also have to acknowledge the rebellion of mankind that puts us under judgment for repudiating our true sonship and degrading the image. The idea of the true "son of God" is expounded in Luke 3. Jesus, at his baptism, is declared to be God's true Son in whom the Father is well pleased. Luke, as if to clarify this assertion, then follows with the genealogy of Jesus in terms of sonship. Jesus is son of Joseph, the son of Heli, and so on all the way back to Adam, the son of God. Adam, the first son of God, rebelled against this status. God's purpose of election finds its focus in Israel who is declared by God to be "my firstborn son" (Exod 4:22-23). God called his son out of Egypt in the exodus (Hos 11:1). Within the context of the covenant promises to David, the son of David is declared to be the son of God (2 Sam 7:12-14).

The baptismal approbation of Jesus, the Son of David, thus takes on added significance. God's sons Adam, Israel, and David's descendants, all repudiated that privilege. Now, one can almost hear heaven sigh with relief because at last here is a true Son in whom God is well pleased. Such a Son is able to say with confidence to his Father, "I knew that you always hear me" (John 11:41-42). Christology, then, is vital to our understanding of prayer. What belongs to the true humanity of Jesus now belongs to all who trust in him. This is the ground of our justification. It is the source of our confidence in our own eventual resurrection to glory (Rom 8:10-11). Christ has become for us our alter-ego so that we have been crucified with him, baptized into his death, made alive with him, raised up with him, and made to sit with him in heavenly places (Gal 2:19-20; Rom 6:3; Eph 2:5-6). In this sense he is our life (Gal 3:3). Paul's description of our "in Christ" and "with Christ" existence indicates that nothing hinders our access to the Father. The intercession of Jesus is the continual reminder of this (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). If it belongs to the risen Jesus to have access to the Father, it also belongs to all who are in union with Christ by faith (Heb 10:19-22).

In summary, the basis of true prayer is the Sonship of Jesus which we share in union with him. The acceptance he has with the Father is the acceptance we now have. That is the essence of our justification by faith. If the Father always hears the Son, then he always hears those who, in Christ, are sons. Women should understand that this is not a gender thing. It is a matter of participating in union with the sonship of Jesus; a participation where there is neither male nor female. Inclusive language translations by making it a gender matter are in danger of blurring this Christological point in passages like Gal 4:6—"And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father!'"

The Source of All Prayer: The Fatherhood of God.

I do not think it is a distortion of the facts to say that many, perhaps most, Christians will think about prayer in terms of what we do and what we need to do. It is a cliché that prayer changes things. It has also become popular in some circles to assert that, in effect, anything we ask for will be granted if we have enough faith. Faith seems to be conceived of as something we squeeze out of ourselves like toothpaste out of a tube. Even in more traditional evangelical circles it seems that the popular view of prayer is a process

that largely begins with us. Of course it is recognized that our agenda for prayer is in some way controlled by Scripture. But, the pattern easily develops into something like this: (for whatever reason) we decide to pray and ask God for something; God hears us (we hope); God rewards our faith by answering our prayer. If we ask people what it is that is changed by prayer, few would feel comfortable in saying that we change God's mind. Yet, that is almost the implication of the approach. It is as if God is unwilling to do good things in us, for us, and in the church and world until we have done enough praying to convince him that he should. The focus on our responsibility in the matter is of course not entirely misplaced. The question is whether or not the conceptualizing of the motive and method in prayer in this way is biblical. I suspect that it is not.

Our discussion thus far about the source of our speaking to God is relevant. The biblical picture is of the internally speaking God (Trinity) who also speaks out from himself and brings the creation into being, creates humans in his own image and then speaks to them to provide for them the framework for their understanding of reality. There are at least two implications of this for prayer. The first is that, if prayer is not addressed to God in terms of what is real, it is a fantasy. True prayer is not asking God to do magic or to create mythical worlds. As Christians we should have a view of reality that is drawn from, and is entirely dependent upon, God's revelation in the Bible. When we pray for conversions, for healings, for world peace, for each other's ministries and welfare, we do so with a sense of the reality of God, his creation, and his sovereign rule over all things, even over the future. Thus the prior word of God is established from the outset as the ground for any human understanding of reality.

The second implication of the creation is that, both before and after the fall of man, God must address us first, if we are to address him within the bounds of reality. The biblical account of reality is that the ideal situation of creation came under judgment because of the rebellion of mankind against God and his good order of things. Because of our rebellion we have no right of access to God, and no desire to approach him (Rom 3:11, 23; 5:12). The biblical picture of prayer is given within the framework of our fallenness and of the grace of salvation: God made the first move towards us and any move we make is a response to this.

Salvation is God's eternal plan that is expressed in his unilateral commitment to his people. In other words, God's promises and acts to save us were done without our consent or co-operation. God sovereignly makes covenant with his people, that is, he commits himself wholly to them (Gen 12:1-3; Rom 5:6-10). But, as God carries out his eternal plan of salvation he does so in the context of a revealing and redeeming word. In the process of saving us God reveals his purposes for the whole creation. The most important thing that God reveals about his creatures is how he is saving us and what he is saving us to (Rom 8:19-23, 29-30; Eph 1:3-10, 18-20). The gospel event (Jesus' life, death, and resurrection) reveals to us what God wills for all who turn to him in repentance and faith, and how the whole universe is involved. We do not yet see or understand the full glory of what is coming, but we do know of it truly (1 John 3:1-2).

What does all this imply for our conception of prayer? Who changes what through prayer? The notion of a God who

needs to be convinced by our prayers that he should act in a particular way really does not sit well with the biblical evidence. I am aware, of course, that there are some biblical texts that may seem to support such a view because they look at the matter subjectively, that is, from the human end. The popular misconceptions often result from the malaise from which we all suffer—our cursed self-centeredness, in which our legitimate subjectivity becomes sinful subjectivism.

The implication of all this is that the foundation of prayer is "thinking God's thoughts after him." Prayer is, of course, more than mere thinking, but thinking God's thoughts as he has revealed them is the basis for addressing God in prayer. Having revealed his purpose God allows us to be involved in the carrying out of his will as his dear children. He gives us the privilege of identifying with his will by asking him to do it. This is part of the process he has chosen to use in order to carry out his plan for the whole universe. If we are to ask for anything "according to his will" (1 John 5:14), then we must refer to his will as revealed in his word. Faith in prayer is not what we dream up but is engendered by hearing the word of Christ (Rom 10:17).

This principle of God's word prior to our prayer is amply illustrated in some biblical passages. David's prayer in 2 Sam 7:18-29 is essentially to ask God to do the very things he has just promised to do (vv. 9-16). Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple centers on the request that God would do what he had promised to do for David (1 Kgs 8:22-26). Jeremiah's letter to the Jewish exiles in Babylon (Jer 29:1-17) explains the logic of prayer in vv. 10-14. First, God tells them what he will do; then they will pray that he will do it; the outcome is that God will do it. Ezekiel is similarly specific in saying that God will let the exiles pray for what he reveals he will do (Ezek 36:37).

The Enabling of All Prayer: The Power of the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean to pray in faith? It is certain from what we have already examined that we cannot be God's children or pray to him without faith. It is sometimes suggested that when our specific prayers are not answered it is because we do not have enough faith. People who talk like this point to passages such as these:

- "According to your faith, be it done to you" (Matt 9:29).
- "Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith" (Matt 21:22).
- "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will" (Mark 11:22).

This often puts people in a guilty bind if they are not healed or their friends are not converted. We need to remind ourselves of what faith is and what it is not.

Faith is our Spirit-empowered response to the Christ of the gospel. The Holy Spirit enables us to respond with faith and repentance to the Jesus of the gospel (John 1:12-13; 3:3-8; Acts 13:48; 16:14). Faith is a part of the process by which God draws us to himself and saves us. We would not believe if the Spirit of God did not remove our blindness and our hatred of God's truth (John 6:37, 44-45; 16:8-11; Eph 2:8-9). Thus, prayer can be spoken of as the Spirit of Christ within us crying to the Father (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).

Our recourse to prayerful petition depends on the fact that God gives us all things through the gospel. Faith must be defined by its object, not by the fervor of the subject. To have faith is to believe

in and place trust in a trustworthy and faithful God who has revealed his will in promises of blessing and salvation. The work of the Spirit is to connect us to the Christ of the gospel. Word and Spirit are not divided. Thus, faith and the word are not divided. The word of the gospel defines our destiny and our inheritance. As God's children we inherit every blessing, and we already possess this by faith (Rom 10:12; Eph 1:3-6; Col 1:4-5).

Authentic prayer is an expression of gospel-based faith. The gospel reveals God's will for us. When we pray we are asking God to bring us, and others, to the goal that he has revealed to us. God has only revealed to us the big picture of our salvation, not the details of how he is bringing us to that goal. As we pray for the means to the end (safety, food, material needs, healing etc.), we must be prepared for God's gracious "no" while we trust him for the best. Remember that we have already reached the ultimate goal by our union with the risen and glorified Christ. It is not faith to demand something that God has not revealed as his will for us. It must also be said that it is not a lack of faith if, in praying for specifics not clearly revealed by God, we use the qualification, "If it is your will."

In summary then: all prayer is conditioned by the nature of the gospel. True faith always looks to its object: the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Pastorally, the problem of "weak" faith is not dealt with by introverted self-examination so much as by looking to the object of faith. The question is not, "Have I enough faith?" but, "Is my faith placed in a trustworthy and faithful God?" The gospel defines God's will for my life which is to be conformed to the image of Christ. The detailed path to that goal is not shown us in advance, but it is amply stated in Scripture that the One who is bringing us to that goal is faithful. To pray in the name of Jesus is to pray according to what he has revealed of himself as our mediator and savior.

This Trinitarian perspective on prayer that we have now considered in outline, is well summed up in Paul's assertion in Gal 4:6, "Because you are sons, God has given us the Spirit of his Son, the Spirit who cries 'Abba, Father!'"

Biblical-Theological Overview of Prayer

The Old Testament

Up to this point I have pursued what might be called a biblico-dogmatic theological approach to our subject. In our study we have been steered by systematic theological concepts specifically relating to the Trinity. Biblical-theological method also involves the diachronic approach of following a particular theme or theological concept as it develops in the salvation-historical framework of revelation. One advantage of this method is that it frequently unpacks the antecedents of a full-blown New Testament or gospel understanding of the subject. I have favored the approach taken because it reinforces the fact that we come to the Old Testament as Christians with certain dogmatic presuppositions already in place. We need both to be aware of these and take advantage of them.

We began with the working hypothesis that prayer is speaking to God. We examined the origins of human speech in the fact that God is a speaking God. How then does God's speech to his people unfold, and what is the nature of their responses to his speech? Jesus shows us that the human being who is the image

of the Father and the true Son of God is a receiver of God's word and a responder to it. Jesus' response is in stark contrast to that of the first humans. The first record of Adam speaking to God is a word of defiance and self-justification. The same can be said of Cain. There is a destructive futility in this sinful reaction to God's word. But the lineage of humans under God's grace, Adam and Abel (who was replaced by Seth) is one which is marked by the fact that, "At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord" (Gen 4:26). In a number of places where we would expect prayer, the narrative seems to assume it, for example in Noah's response to God's commands and in his offering sacrifice.

In the earlier stages of the Old Testament we find two major emphases with regard to prayer. The first is that it is tied to the covenant relationship between a gracious God and his people. The second is the emphasis on the role of the key representative ministries as intercessors. In both of these the foundations for the Christological perspective are laid. It is vital to recognize the link between these offices and the ministry of Christ if we are to avoid unfruitful exemplary deductions being drawn from the great covenantal figures to the Christian. Whatever the exemplary value of the practices of Abraham or Moses or David (and they are many), the Christological value is much nearer to the heart of the gospel. In other words, while Christians may learn much from the heroes of the Bible about the life of faith, our true example is Jesus who establishes the integrity of our faith and practice by being more than an example. Without the grace of justification our attempts at the imitation of Christ are futile and, in fact, godless. In layman's terms, we grow as Christians, not by becoming more like Abraham or Moses, but by becoming more like Jesus. And we can only grow more like Jesus when we are depending on the grace of justification.

Abraham intercedes for Sodom (Gen 18:22-33), and as intercessor he is called a prophet (Gen 20:7). Little more is said about intercession until Moses, who is also the definitive prophet. What emerges is that the prophetic role is not only to speak the word of God to people, but also to represent the people in speaking an intercessory word on their behalf to God. Of the prayer life of the ordinary Israelite we have little information at this stage. We can only infer that it existed, especially in connection with the cultic rites such as offering of sacrifices. It would seem that the biblical concentration on the role of the key representative offices in intercession is deliberate. This is the emphasis in Joshua and it continues into the period of the Judges. Joshua's role has clear indications that he carries on the intercessory role of Moses (Josh 7:7-9, cf. Exod 32:30-34; 33:7-23; Num 14:13-19; 21:7-9)

When we come to the Book of Samuel the prophetic role as intercessor is again evident. The prayer of Hannah may seem to highlight the prayer of an ordinary Israelite, but it turns out to be anything but. To be sure, she is portrayed initially as having no cultic role and, therefore, as representing "lay" piety in prayer. However, her prayer is linked with the temple, and is clearly given the prominence that it has because it leads to the gift of a child who becomes the great prophet Samuel. Hannah's prayer is recalled in Mary's *magnificat* at the annunciation (Luke 1:46-55), which suggests that Mary understood that the theological significance of both

events was linked. Samuel is portrayed as both proclaimer of God's word, and as intercessor for a wayward people (1 Sam 7:8-9; 8:6-22; 12:16-25).

If we accept the ascription of many of the Psalms to David, we must acknowledge that once again the emphasis is on the role of the representative officer as the praying Israelite. This in no way takes away from the inference that ordinary "lay" Israelites would also learn to pray. Nevertheless, we must ask why the inspired Scriptures emphasize that the ones whose distinct role is to represent the many (prophet, priest, king) were above all the intercessors. The only conclusion that we can reach is that it points to the foundational role of Jesus, the true prophet, priest, and king, as the human intercessor upon whose prayers the efficacy of all prayer is dependent. I would suggest that, above all, it is this prophetic role as intercessor that is fulfilled by Jesus as the one who enters the presence of the Father and makes intercession for the saints.

In the narrative literature, a key prayer is that of Solomon at the dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 8). We must not put this in the category of a dedication of a church building. It is nothing of the sort! The temple was the visible representation of the presence of God among his people. Solomon knew full well that God was not confined to this temple made with hands. Yet it was the place where God was pleased to make his name to dwell. The building of the temple was the prime expression of Solomon's wisdom. In that fact alone we see the doctrine of creation, as well as the covenant of salvation, being given expression in the temple. The temple and the ministries of atonement, reconciliation, and sanctification that were rightly performed there, were what made sense of life and of the universe for the believing Israelite. Solomon's prayer recognizes this. The covenant of grace, with its promise of salvation, is the basis of this prayer (1 Kgs 8:23-24). Solomon expresses the legitimate nature of prayer in that he asks that God will perform what he has already promised to do (vv. 25-26). The temple is the means of approaching God in heaven where his true dwelling is (vv. 27-30). Solomon's insights thus foreshadow the truth that the true temple, the risen Jesus, is the gateway to the presence of the Father in heaven.

Prayer in the eschatology of the prophets takes on some new emphases. Here the prayers of the faithful remnant of Israel that is being saved come into some prominence. This broadens the emphasis that we have seen to date in that it is presumably ordinary Israelites that are involved (e.g., Isa 55:6-7; 58:9; Jer 33:3; Zeph 3:9, 14-20). Yet, even here we should note that the theme of the remnant of the true Israelites is fulfilled primarily in the person of Jesus who comes as the only true Israelite. Thus, the praying nature of the congregation of the faithful is also stamped with Christology. The outworking of the theme of the remnant that is to be saved is clearly focused on Jesus. Once again, it is his prayer that establishes the basis of our prayer. The focus of these Old Testament prayers is predominantly on God as the savior and Lord of his people. It is also significant that the restored temple is perceived as the place of prayer, since the New Testament locates this new temple in Jesus (e.g., Isa 2:2-4; 27:12-13; 56:7). We must suppose that the concentration on Zion in prophetic eschatology is due to the fact that it is the city of God in which the temple constitutes the place where he

meets his people.

The New Testament

It is not necessary to try to deal with all the prayers of the New Testament. We must be content with a few observations. First of all, it may seem strange that a group of Jewish men who presumably had been taught to pray from their earliest childhood should approach Jesus with the request to be taught to pray (Luke 11:1). We can only conjecture that Jesus' own example and the growing recognition that he represented some very significant movement of God led to the request. It has been suggested that at least two aspects of the Lord's Prayer would have surprised them: that they could call God "Father," and that the petition should predominate. Calling Yahweh "Father" is rare in the Old Testament, which may partly account for the strange preservation of the Aramaic vernacular "abba" in the New Testament (Mark 14:36; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). It is possible that petitionary prayer had largely fallen into the background in Judaism. Certainly, modern Judaism seems to focus more on praise than petition in its liturgies.

It is obvious that Jesus would address the Father in his prayers and teach his disciples to do the same. What, then, can we say about prayer addressed to the risen Christ and to the Holy Spirit? From the theological angle we recognize the Trinity as one God. The unity of God means that all three persons of the Trinity are involved in any divine action, including listening to our prayers. The distinction in God, however, means quite simply that the three persons are ontologically distinct though not separate. The ontological distinctions also affect the roles in that they cannot be interchanged. The Father sends the Son, the Son is sent and is incarnated to live, die, and rise for our salvation. The Father and the Son send the Spirit and make themselves present to the people of God by the Spirit.

When we examine the evidence of the New Testament we find that almost all the prayers recorded after the ascension of Christ are directed to the Father. The exceptions are unique and hardly prescriptive for all time. The first such event recorded is Stephen's prayer to Jesus because, as he dies, he sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 8:55). So he prays, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (v. 59). Second, there is Paul's address to Jesus in response to the risen Christ's challenge to him on the Damascus road (Acts 9:4-5). Paul does not know whom he addresses and asks, "Who are you Lord?" The reply, "I am Jesus whom you persecute," indicates that Paul addresses the Son by default. Finally, the closing words of the New Testament include the prayerful expression, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20). This is in response to the words of Christ, "Surely I am coming soon (v. 20).

Once the Christology of the New Testament is set in place in that Jesus of Nazareth is portrayed as the one in whom all the promises of God are affirmed (2 Cor 1:20), the broader perspective of prayer becomes evident. It belongs to those who, in Christ, are sons of the Father. It is always directed at the fulfilling of God's revealed purposes in the gospel. In Acts we find a young church that prays. When we study the content we find prayers for guidance, for help in times of danger, for healing and welfare, and for outsiders. We also find praise for the marvelous blessings of God.

Paul's prayers included in his epistles

illustrate the point that prayer is always towards the goals of the saving event of Christ as proclaimed in the gospel. Paul also gives much instruction about prayer that reveals something of his own practice. He instructs his readers to pray because he understands the difficulties in perseverance in prayer (e.g., Rom 12:12; 1 Cor 7:5; Phil 4:4-6; 1 Thess 5:16-21; 1 Tim 2:1; 5:5). He notes the effects of prayer (e.g., Rom 10:13; 2 Cor 1:11; Phil 1:19; 1 Tim 4:5). Prayer is important to him for his own ministry and he requests others to pray for him. It is a primary means of fellowship with those who are absent (e.g., Rom 15:30-32; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1). Paul also penned two important passages on the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian prayer (Rom 8:19-27; Gal 4:6). In all this Paul's Trinitarian theology is clear.

Paul tells us something of the way he prays concerning his own ministry. He prays that he might visit the Christians in Rome (Rom 1:8-10), and revisit the church in Thessalonica (2 Thess 3:10). His special concern for the Jews, an expression of his understanding of the role of the Jews in the covenant purposes of God, leads to his heart-felt prayer for them to be saved (Rom 10:1). Paul's prayers for the Christians to whom he writes is that the gospel will have its outworking in their lives and witness. The eschatological goal is always in his mind: the presenting of the saints mature and perfect on the day of Christ. In short, Paul always prays with the purpose and goals of the gospel in mind.

The writer to the Hebrews makes one request of his readers to "pray for us" (Heb 13:18). He refers once to Jesus' prayer while here in the flesh (Heb 5:7). The most significant statement is his reference to Jesus' ongoing and eternal priesthood and the fact that he lives to make intercession for his people (Heb 7:24-25). This representative role is the enabling of our prayer, by implication, and the exhortation for us to "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb 10:21-23).

The Book of Revelation makes three references to the prayers of the saints (Rev 5:8; 8:3, 4). Each of these indicates that the prayers of the saints have come up before God and the Lamb. The prayer utterances recorded in Revelation are hymns of praise (4:8, 11; 5:9-10, 12, 13; 11:17-18; 15:3-4; 16:5-7; 19:1-3, 5, 6-8). These all belong to the visions of the heavenly regions and express the eschatological consummation of the gospel. Petition has been transformed into praise for the glory now revealed. It seems appropriate that the only petition on behalf of the suffering church on earth is in response to the promise of Christ to come soon: "Amen, come Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20).

Conclusion

I have concentrated on two main aspects of the theology of prayer in this discussion. First, the doctrine of the Trinity provides the dogmatic framework for the Christian understanding of prayer. The three persons of the Godhead in their unity and distinction establish the parameters of prayer. Prayer comes from the Father and is given its perfect utterance by the Son through the fellowship of the Spirit. Theologically speaking, prayer only becomes an aspect of our Christian existence because of our union with Christ the intercessor. That union with Christ is possible through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit.

The second emphasis of this discussion is the role of the Old Testament in laying the foundations of the theology of prayer in the New Testament. This theology

includes the Christology of vicarious and mediatorial intercession. The Reformation emphasis on the offices of Christ in terms of the Old Testament roles of prophet, priest, and king, is sound and underpins the important fact that our only way to be heard by our heavenly Father is "through Jesus Christ, Our Lord."

ENDNOTES

[1]This subject is dealt with in greater detail in the author's book, *Prayer and the Knowledge of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003).

[2]See Michael Raiter, *Stirrings of the Soul: Evangelicals and the New Spirituality* (Kingsford, NSW: Matthias Media, 2003).

[3]A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1961), 109.

[4]Vern S. Poythress, *God Centered Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1999), 16-25.

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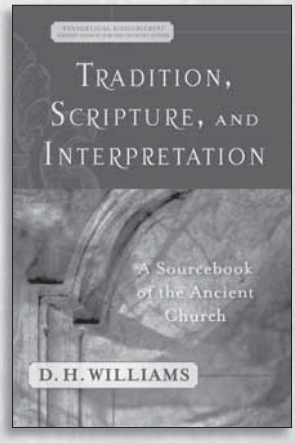

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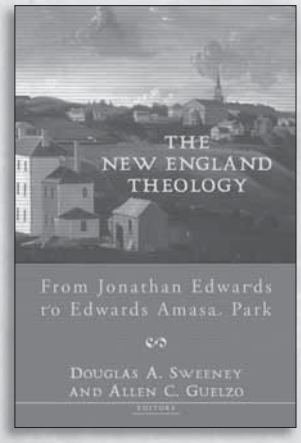

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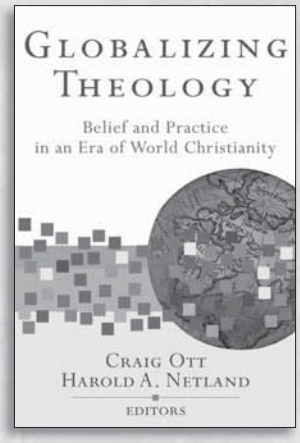

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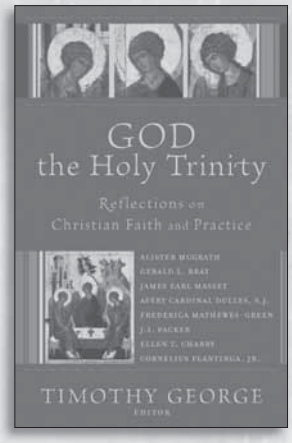

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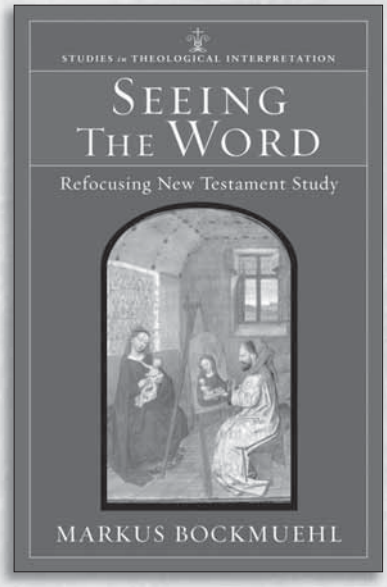

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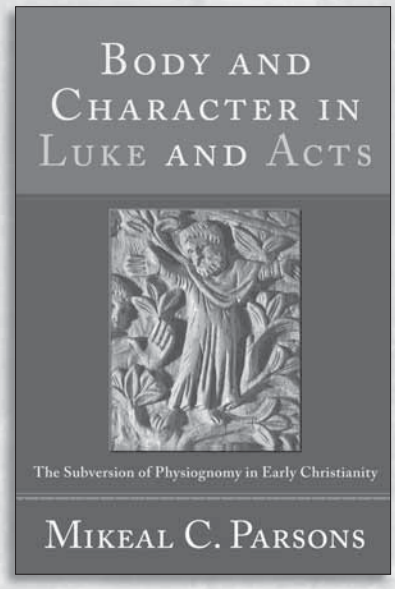

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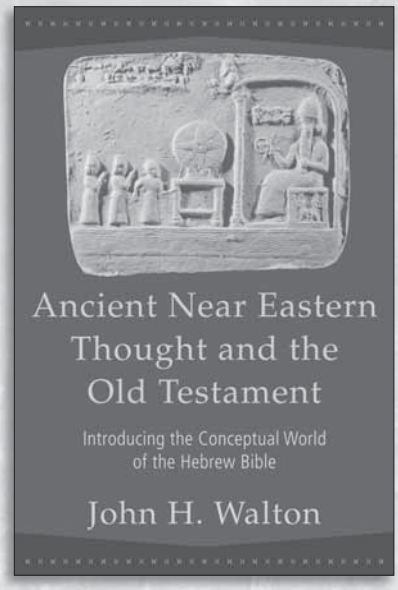

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God's Powerful Words: Five Principles of Biblical Spirituality in Isaiah 55

Peter Adam

Peter Adam is Principal at Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia. For twenty years, he was minister of St Jude's Carlton in Melbourne. He is also Canon of St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne. Dr. Adam has spoken at conferences for preachers in England, Pakistan, India, and New Zealand. He is the author of several books, including *Hearing God's Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality* (InterVarsity, 2004) in the New Studies in Biblical Theology series.

Introduction

Biblical spirituality is based on the conviction that God has spoken to us, and has made use of human words as the means of his powerful, effective, and productive verbal communication. The powerful, active, and creative God has chosen to use human words, and to achieve his purposes through them.

The Bible uses a variety of graphic images to convey the reality of God's power. God's "right hand and holy arm" achieve salvation (Ps 98:1); the "eyes of the LORD" always watch over his land (Deut 11:12); to ask God to "turn your ear to me" is to ask him to hear and answer prayer (Ps 31:2). So to "hear the word of the LORD" is to listen to "the words of his mouth" (Jer 9:20). The words of God powerfully achieve his purpose. As King Solomon claimed, "Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses" (1 Kgs 8:56).

Confidence in the power of God's words is fundamental to Christian spirituality, as it is also fundamental to Christian ministry. If God's words are powerful and effective, then we must hear them and receive God's sustaining and transformative power.[1] If God's words are powerful and effective, then we must make good use of them to achieve effective ministry.[2]

Our focus here is on the power of God's words to create and sustain believers. It is the crucial and universal message from the Old Testament that Jesus Christ applied to himself in the desert, when tempted to turn stones into bread: "It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matt 4:4; from Deut. 1:12). Biblical spirituality means hearing words from the mouth of God.

We have a moral duty to pay attention to the words of others, to try to enter their world of meaning rather than staying in our own, to discipline our hearing and concentration so that we not only hear their words, but listen as well for the meaning and significance of those words to the person who is speaking.[3] This takes love, concentration, imagination, patience, and the humility to admit when we have misheard or misunderstood. We owe the same duty to God. Furthermore, the longer we have known someone, the more attentively we have listened to them in the past, and the more patience and love we have for them, the more likely we are to understand the meaning of their words to us. So it is with God. Of course we may get it wrong, we may be deaf to what God says to us in the Scriptures, we may misconstrue God's meaning, but the fact that we may often misunderstand does not mean that we can never understand.[4] Our duty and joy is to hear, receive, and obey the words that God has spoken to us in Scripture, so that God accomplishes his good purpose through and in our lives. In the words of Jeremiah Burroughs, "[W]e should listen as much to the voice of God in the ministry of His Word as if…the

Lord should speak out of the clouds to us."[5]

The theme of the powerful and fruitful word of the LORD is a key to Biblical spirituality, and is also a key to the book of Isaiah, and we see it especially clearly in Isaiah 55. We should derive the shape of our spirituality from the Bible, and Isaiah 55 is a notable source. This chapter describes biblical spirituality in microcosm, and so sheds light on biblical spirituality in general, and on the whole of the Bible. In it we find five principles of biblical spirituality:

(1) The Invitation (vv. 1-3)
(2) The Basis of the Invitation (vv. 3-5)
(3) The Problem That Frustrates the Invitation (vv. 6-9)
(4) The Solution to This Problem (vv. 10-11)
(5) The Promise That the Solution Will Be Effective (vv. 12-13).

The Invitation

"Come, all you who are thirsty." "Come, buy and eat." "Listen, listen to me." "Give ear and come to me, hear me, that your soul may live" (vv. 1-3).

The chapter begins with the gracious invitation of God to "come" to him. This invitation expresses God's plan to draw his people from exile in Babylon back to Jerusalem. It echoes similar words of invitation in this part of Isaiah:

- "Comfort, comfort my people" (40:1).
- "Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion" (52:1).
- "Sing, O barren one who did not bear…burst into song" (54:1).
- "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you" (60:1).

Here is the first principle of biblical spirituality. We come to God in response to his gracious invitation to come and listen to him. The invitation to "come" to God lies at the heart of biblical spirituality. It is an invitation to a relationship, to a response to God, and a movement towards God. It is echoed in the call of Christ, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened" (Matt 11:28).

It is a gracious invitation because it is addressed to those who are "thirsty," aware of their need; and to those who have no resources, "you who have no money, come buy and eat." God has taken the initiative in his gracious invitation. The people do not deserve God's grace: it is his free gift.

It is a verbal invitation, for how will they know to "come," unless they hear the word of God through the prophet Isaiah? And to "come" is to "listen, listen to me," to "give ear and come to me, and hear me, that your soul may live." (55:1-3).

They must listen to God, in order to hear his invitation, command, and promise. How else will they know that they must leave Babylon under the gracious protection of God, if they do not hear his words of invitation and command? How else will we know to turn to God, to come to God, unless we hear and listen to the words of God?

The invitation to "come," is also an invitation and command to "listen." No coming without listening; no listening without coming. This invitation was graciously given in human words through the prophet Isaiah. Relationship to God and attentive listening to God's words through the prophet were fundamental to the spiritual life of the people. The same is true of our spirituality.

The Basis of the Invitation

The basis of the invitation is the promise of God that he will accomplish

his covenant with David: "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David" (v. 3). In Oswalt's words,

> God had made irrecoverable promises to David. As he kept those promises, Israel could participate in the blessings. As David experienced God's *certain mercies* [utterly dependable acts of covenant love—*hesed*], so Israel could participate in them as well.[6]

David was dead, and it looked as if God's promises to David had failed: there was no descendant of David ruling God's people in Jerusalem, and the nations had triumphed over them. Yet the covenant promise of God would still be fulfilled, and that word of promise spoken to David so many years ago still remained as the basis of the return of the people of God to Jerusalem, and to the fulfilment of God's gospel plan to bring the nations to see the future splendour of God among his people (vv. 4, 5).

Here is the second principle of biblical spirituality. God's invitation was not a last minute invention, a spur of the moment idea. It was based on God's long term covenant plan which he had originally promised to David, and which one day would be fulfilled in the coming and reign of Jesus Christ. So God's promise to David was fulfilled in God's word to his people in Isaiah 55, and was to be further fulfilled in the coming of Christ.

The invitation to come to God in coming from Babylon to Jerusalem was based on the promise of God, the character of God, the work of God, God's power to use people and nations to achieve his will, and on his forgiveness—his forgiveness through the saving work of his servant. What his words achieve in his people, his words achieve for his people. The great work of God was to bring his people back to Jerusalem. They would benefit from God's great work as they responded to his present invitation based on his past promises. They were summoned by God's cumulative verbal revelation. The invitation to "come" and to "listen" is based on God's ancient covenant promised to David, recorded in the Scriptures, which God now promised to fulfil in the life of God's people. What God had promised in former days, he would now fulfil.

The Problem That Frustrates the Invitation

- "Seek the LORD", "call on him", "let the wicked forsake his way, and the evil man his thoughts", "turn to the LORD" (vv. 6, 7).
- "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my way" (v. 8).
- "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (v. 9).

The people of God had heard God's gracious words before in his promises to David, and yet had disobeyed them, and turned away from David's God and their God. So to the words "come" and "listen," the prophet must add "seek" and "forsake," "wicked" and "evil" ways. Here is an essential element in biblical spirituality: to "come" is to "listen," and those who "come" and "listen" must also "seek," "forsake," and "turn" from "wicked ways" and "evil thoughts." Any attempt to obey and respond to God's invitation to come to him and listen to him must face the vast gap between the thoughts and ways of God, and our thoughts and ways—a gap caused by our wickedness and evil. Sin is the enemy of true spirituality as surely as false spirituality is a sign of our sin. As Jonathan Edwards has shown, there are many false forms of spirituality that are

only the product of thoughts and ways that are far from God.[7]

The people of God are in exile because of their sinfulness and their sins, and those sins are sins of failing to hear and obey God's words given in the law and in the prophets: "They mocked God's messengers, despised his words, and scoffed at this prophets" (2 Chron 36:16). So coming to God and listening to God was not as easy as it sounded, when their universal pattern has been to mock, despise and scoff at God's words and messengers.

We cannot come or listen unless we also seek him, forsake our wicked and evil thoughts, and turn to the LORD. Repentance is integral to our relationship with God while we are in this present age, and there is no "cheap grace,"[8] no coming and listening without forsaking our ways, and turning from our ways to God.

Notice too the immensity of the problem, the great gulf between our thoughts and actions, and God's thoughts and actions: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (v. 9). Furthermore, through the prophet, God carefully mentions his own thoughts and ways before the thoughts and ways of the people. This is because God's thoughts and ways are definitive, and set the standard for us. We should think God's thoughts after him, and follow his ways. But there is an immeasurable gulf between God and ourselves. No wonder Israel found it difficult to come to God and to listen to God; no wonder we find it difficult to come to God and to listen to God. And it is not enough to "forsake wicked ways and evil thoughts," the people must "turn to the LORD," in order to find "mercy" and "free pardon."

Here is the third principle of biblical spirituality, namely our impotence, our inability to bridge the gap. How then can humans know and serve God? How can the great gulf between God's thoughts and actions and our thoughts and actions be bridged? How can we listen to God when his thoughts and ways are in heaven, and our thoughts and ways are earthbound and sinful? Here is the great dilemma of our attempts at spirituality, our attempts to draw near to God. We cannot climb from earth to heaven, from our thoughts and ways to God's thoughts and ways, by our effort. We cannot achieve it by repentance and good works, nor by intellectual or rational thought, nor by our intuition, nor by exercising our innate spirituality, nor by mystic experiences, nor by common sense. How, then, can the gulf be bridged?

The Solution to This Problem

> "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (vv. 10, 11).

It is the word of God that bridges the gap between divine and human reality, between heaven and earth, between God's thoughts and our thoughts, between God's ways and our ways. It goes out from God's mouth to achieve his saving purpose. It is as powerful, effective, and fruitful as the rain and snow that come down from heaven and "water the earth and [make] it bud and flourish, so that it yields sufficient seed for the sower, as well as bread for the eater (vv. 11, 10).

In v. 9, the theme is that of distance and contrast between heaven and earth,

between God and his people: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." This gap is not because they are merely human, but because they are wicked and unrighteous (v. 7). Our problem is not our humanity, our finitude, but our sinfulness. It is not our humanity that is the barrier to true spirituality, but our flawed humanity, our sin. We have abandoned God's thoughts and ways for our own thoughts and ways, far removed from God. All praise to God, who bridges the vast gulf between his thoughts and ways, and our thoughts and ways, by his word!

So while the first illustration from nature shows the gap between God and his sinful people, the second illustration shows how God bridges the gap by his powerful and effective word. God has drawn near in his word, so they should seek him "while he may be found," and call upon him "while he is near" (v. 6). As Motyer comments, "The second natural illustration turns on a different relationship between earth and heaven…. The parallel between the life agency of rain and the effective word is exact…. The word of God is the unfailing agent of the will of God."[9]

The cosmic effects of God's words are reflected in the comparison between rain and snow, and the word of God, in vv. 10, 11.

> • The rain and snow "come down from heaven" (v. 10), so does "my word…that goes out from my mouth" (v. 11).
> • The rain and snow "do not return… without watering the earth" (v. 10), so God's word "will not return to me empty" (v. 11).
> • The rain and snow not only water the earth, but do so purposefully and effectively, "making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater" (v. 10), so God's word achieves all that he intends, "it will accomplish what I desire, and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (v. 11).

Here is a fourth vital principle of biblical spirituality. The word of God will not only communicate present reality, that is, that God's people are far distant from God, but will also effect and bring about a change in that reality, as God brings his people to repentance as they hear and obey his words of invitation and covenant promise. God's word bridges the gap. Oswalt writes, "God has come *near* his people, not only in the work of the Servant that has been predicted, but also in the preaching of the prophet throughout the book."[10] "It is because *what* God says is the truth that the word *will* perform exactly what God intends."[11]

Notice also the way in which the power of the word of God is asserted both negatively, "It will not return to me empty," and also positively, "but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (v. 11). It is never ineffective; it is always effective. It is never powerless; it is always powerful. God's word never has to repent of failure!

The word of God is the means by which he makes himself close to his people, and makes his salvation effective in their lives. Calvin comments,

> Thus also Moses recalled the people to the knowledge of God. "Say thou not, Who shall ascend to heaven? … The word is nigh, in thy mouth and in thy heart." [Deut. 30:12]. "That is," saith Paul, "the word of faith which we preach" [Rom. 10:8].[12]

God graciously bridges that hermeneutical and epistemological gap by his word, which comes from heaven to earth, never fails, and always achieves its purpose.

God's gospel word bridges the gap, reflecting Christ's descent from heaven to earth for our salvation. God made the journey. God came down into the world of our frailty and sinfulness. As the gospel is the power of God for salvation to all who believe, so the word of God will not fail. For Christ has overcome sin, won forgiveness, and given us free and confident access to God the Father. True spirituality is gospel-shaped, and is founded on that grace on which we stand in Christ Jesus. "[B]y spiritual things [Paul] means the things of the Spirit of God, and things which the Holy Ghost teacheth."[13]

The Promise That the Solution Will Be Effective

The promise that the solution will be effective, that God's word will achieve his purpose, is expressed both in the imagery of the fertility and prosperity achieved by the rain of God's word, and in the result of that fertile power in the return of God's people from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem.

> For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off (vv. 12, 13).

God's word is not ineffective, powerless, or sterile, but effective, powerful, and fertile.

So the power of the word of God is of central importance in this chapter. It is not a call to come to God, as if human effort is all that is needed. The call of God is an effective call. It is a call or invitation, that is, it comes in the form of words (vv. 1, 2). It is effective because it is based on the hope of an everlasting covenant—the covenant made with King David (vv. 3-5). It is effective because God's prophetic word will not return empty, but will accomplish and succeed in achieving Gods' purpose of bringing his people to receive all that God offers. They will come, listen, seek, call on him, forsake their wicked ways, and turn to their merciful and pardoning God (vv. 1-7). It is effective, even though the minds and hearts of the people are so far away from God's mind and heart (vv. 8, 9). It is effective, because the cosmic results of God's promise and word, and of the people's repentance, are promised and foretold by God in a powerful promise of abundant fertility (vv. 12, 13).

Furthermore, the word of God that comes out of God's mouth in human words comes to his people and to us from the human mouth of the prophet Isaiah. God not only deigns to use human words, but to have them heard and read from the mouth and pen of the prophet. As Calvin comments,

> The word *goeth out of the mouth* of God in such a manner that it likewise "goeth out of the mouth" of men; for God does not speak openly from heaven, but employs men as his instruments, that by their agency he may make known his will.[14]

Here is the double condescension of God, the overwhelming grace of God, that he not only uses human words, but also places them in human mouths and pens, that humans may hear, trust, and know him in his saving acts.

When we see Isaiah 55 in its context in the whole book of Isaiah, we learn that this theme of the efficacy and power of God's word is of fundamental importance.[15] As their partial fulfilment gives the people

hope in trusting God's present promises, so also God's present promises and powerful words will also mean the more complete fulfilment of those covenant promises from the past.[16]

For the same theme of the power of the word of God is found in Isaiah 40:6-8. Here the invitation is found in God's words, "Comfort," "speak," and "cry" or "proclaim." The words are addressed to God's people in exile in Babylon, and also addressed to the prophet who will take these words to God's people ("What shall I cry?" [v. 6]). And what is the basis for a message of comfort? They can trust God's word, for though "the people are grass . . . the word of our God will stand forever" (vv. 6, 8).

Furthermore, there is a clear contrast between the destructive force of "the breath of the LORD" in v. 7, and "the word of our God" in v. 8. In vv. 6-7, the inconstant and ephemeral people are like grass that withers and fades, but this fragility also derives from the breath or wind of God, as when a hot wind devastates grassland. However if the breath or wind of the LORD means destruction in v. 7, the word of our God means hope in v. 8. For if the people are inconstant, God is constant; if the people are mortal, God is unchanging; if the people are ephemeral, the word of our God will stand forever.

God's word brings effecting life-giving and abundant fertility, so that God's promises will be achieved in and through his people. The fertile energy lies in God's word, not in our imaginations, our creativity, our emotions, or our searching. God's words are "living oracles" (Acts 7:38), which are also life-giving words. In the words of John Gill, Christ's sheep will hear

> the voice of Christ, the great and good shepherd, in the gospel and in his ministers; which is a voice of love, grace, and mercy; a voice of peace, pardon, righteousness, life, and salvation by Christ; a soul-quickening voice, a very powerful one, a soul-charming, a soul-alluring voice; a comforting and rejoicing one, and therefore very desirable to be heard…blessed are the people that hear and know this joyful sound.[17]

This theme of the fertile power of God's word is common throughout the Bible. For the word and gospel of God is living, active, powerful, and fertile:

- "The word of truth, the gospel, that has come to you . . . is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world . . . it has been bearing fruit among your selves" (Col 1:5, 6).
- "You have been born anew . . . through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet 1:23).
- "He gave us birth by the word of truth. . . . Welcome with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls" (Jas 1:18, 21).
- "The sower sows the word. . . . [T]he kingdom of God is as someone sowed seed upon the ground. . . . [T]he kingdom of God is like a mustard seed" (Mark 4:14, 26, 31).

We may describe this in theological terms as the power of God in "the word of God" (the gospel) in "the words of God" (the Bible).

So the Bible is a "means," not a bare sign. The Bible is God's words intrinsically and, therefore, also instrumentally. It not only points out where God's power is used, for example, in a healing or nature miracle, but is also a means of God's power at work in our world. Here is the fifth principle of biblical spirituality, that God's words are powerful, fruitful, and effective.

Here is Thomas Cranmer's tribute to the power of Bible words:

> For the Scripture of God is the heav-

> enly meat of our souls: the hearing and keeping of it makes us blessed, sanctifies us, and makes us holy: it turns our souls; it is a light to our feet: it is a sure, steadfast and everlasting instrument of salvation: it gives wisdom to the humble and lowly-hearted: it comforts, makes glad, cheers, and cherishes our consciences.[18]

Again Cranmer reminds us of the power of the Scriptures:

> The words of Holy Scripture are called the words of everlasting life; for they are God's instruments, ordained for the same purpose. They have power to turn through God's promise, and they are effectual through God's assistance; and being received in a faithful heart, they have a heavenly spiritual working in them.[19]

When Kevin Vanhoozer writes about "God's mighty speech-acts," he uses modern speech-act theory to explain a doctrine of scripture.[20] So the Bible contains the varied speech-acts of the personal God. As Calvin comments,

> *God is true*, not only because he is prepared to stand faithfully to his promises, but because he also really fulfils whatever he declares; for he so speaks, that his command becomes a reality.[21]

God's words are effective secondary causes. God is the primary cause of everything in the universe. Sometimes he works without using human language. Sometimes he uses human language as a "secondary cause" to achieve his will. He is so great and powerful that he can use human words without endangering his transcendence. His words achieve his relational and revelatory purposes. God's effective "secondary causes" can be described as God's "instruments." Calvin writes, "The word is the instrument by which the Lord dispenses the illumination of the Spirit to believers."[22] Indeed the words of God convey the power of God so completely that we can claim that God is present in his speech, in his words, as he is present in his other actions.

There is an unhelpful strand of teaching in both theology and spirituality, which claims that God's revelation happens independently of words, and that words are either just God's pointers to that non-verbal revelation, or else merely human attempts to make sense of that non-verbal revelation. Karl Barth held that revelation happened independently of the words of the Bible.[23] Similarly, John Spong teaches, "[the] Bible is the means by which I hear, confront, interact with the Word of God. No, the words of the Bible are not for me the words of God."[24]

What a contrast to Jesus' claim, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life," and to Peter's reply, "You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:63, 68). The Bible is revelation, and not just a witness to revelation. In the words of Austin Farrer, "The inspiration is to be found in the very words and nowhere else."[25]

Conclusion

What, then, have we learned about Biblical spirituality from Isaiah 55?

(1) *The invitation.* We come to God in response to his gracious verbal invitation to come to him and to listen to his words.
(2) *The Basis.* The invitation to "come" and to "listen" is based on God's covenant promises, recorded in the Scriptures.
(3) *The Problem.* Our thoughts and ways are far removed from God's thoughts and ways, because of our sinfulness. We are powerless to climb from earth to heaven.
(4) *The Solution.* God's word comes from heaven to earth, never fails, and always achieves its purpose.

(5) *The Promise*. God's words are powerful, fruitful, and effective and will produce an abundant harvest of gospel fruit.

For contemporary Christians it is important to remember that God's words through Isaiah remain his powerful words today. God's words in the mouth of his prophet, and in his writings, are powerful and effective. Those same words remain powerful today in our lives, as also in our mouths as we use them to challenge, encourage, or rebuke others, whether believers or not yet believers. These words remain the living and active words of God. "For 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' That word is the good news that was announced to you" (1 Pet 1:24, 25).

God's human words, given through his prophet, and written down for his people during and after the exile, were also written down and preserved for us, for, "everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4). So let us heed this warning and encouragement: "See to it that you do not refuse the one who is speaking . . . the one who warns from heaven" (Heb 12:25).

ENDNOTES

[1]Peter Adam, *Hearing God's Words* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004).

[2]Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996).

[3]See Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

[4]See Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word*: *The Clarity of Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006).

[5]Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Worship* (1648; repr., Morgan , PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), 210.

[6]John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 438.

[7]Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1986).

[8]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM, 1959), 35-47.

[9]J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 457, 458.

[10]Oswalt, *Isaiah,* 442-43.

[11]Ibid, 446, n. 61.

[12]John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* in *Calvin's Commentaries* (22 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 8:170.

[13]Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, 126.

[14]Calvin, *Isaiah*, 8:172.

[15]Barry Webb has shown how the theme of chapter 54 is that of, "Every promise fulfilled," as we see God's covenant promises through Abraham (vv. 1-3), at the exodus (vv. 4-8), and his covenant with the nations through Noah (vv. 9-17) will yet reach their complete fulfilment (Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996], 215, 216).

[16]Again, as Webb observes, "The resounding affirmations of the power of God's word in 40:6-8 and 55:10-11 form a kind of bracket around the whole of chapters 40-55" (ibid, 218).

[17]John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: or A System of Evangelical Truths Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures* (1769; repr., Paris, AR: Baptist

Standard Bearer, 1987), 933.

[18]Thomas Cranmer, "The First Part of the Exhortation to the Reading of Holy Scripture," in *Certain Sermons or Homilies* [London: SPCK, 1864], 3.

[19]Ibid., 3, 4.

[20]Kevin Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech-Acts: The Doctrine of Scripture Today," in *A Pathway into the Holy Scriptures* (ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 143-81).

[21]John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans*, in *Calvin's Commentaries*, 19:116.

[22]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2 vols.; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:96.

[23]Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse—Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 63-74.

[24]John Shelby Spong, *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 249.

[25]Austin Farrer, *Interpretation and Belief* (London: SPCK, 1976), 12.

The Reformation Piety of Theodore Beza

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Introduction

Theodore Beza (1519-1605) remains one of the enigmas of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation even though he led the church in Geneva, and its efforts in France, from the death of John Calvin in 1564 until his own death forty-one years later. These were tumultuous years in Geneva's history, and Beza led a very exciting and busy life at its helm.[1] But many scholars assume that Beza transformed Calvin's theology in the process, acting as a hinge between the biblical emphasis of the early Reformation and the later philosophical and logical (but not primarily biblical) emphases of Protestant Scholasticism.[2] We cannot here enter into the complexities of this debate, although we think that these charges are fundamentally wrong.[3] Our purposes in this article are much more modest. Here we hope to point out the major contours of Beza's piety.[4] Our hope is primarily to trace the course of Beza's thinking on this significant subject so that we can learn from him.

To understand Beza's piety we must attempt to enter into his worldview. This is necessary because Beza's view of ultimate realities shaped his evaluation of what was essential to Christian living. We will see that Beza had a very supernatural view of reality, complete with God and Satan, heaven and hell. This "eschatological vision," as I will call it, meant that for Beza the single most important aspect of Christian piety was that a believer might navigate the vicissitudes of life and arrive safely in heaven. With this eschatological vision as the necessary background to Beza's thought, we shall then note three of Beza's emphases concerning Christian piety. First, we shall see the importance of the word of God; second, the reality of difficulties in Christian living; and, third, the hopefulness of God's sovereignty to Christian piety. These components together comprise Beza's realistic, yet ultimately optimistic, view of the Christian life.

Beza's Eschatological Vision

Contrary to many historians' evaluations of Theodore Beza, I do not think Beza was primarily a scholastic logician. Instead, I believe that a careful reading of his works shows that he was fundamentally an affectionate follower of Jesus Christ, who yearned to be with Christ, but who viewed the Christian's life as a struggle. The hardships of the Christian life were the result of a battle raging between Satan and God. Although the outcome of the struggle for Christians was sure (i.e., they would certainly arrive in heaven), hell was a reality that was to be avoided at all costs. Here we will briefly outline the contours of Beza's eschatological vision.

The Fact of the Spiritual Battle

Beza depicted Satan as active in the world, indefatigably trying to harm Christians.[5] So he indicted Satan as the

foremost of "my enemies" in his meditation on Psalm 102. The devil was "that great devouring lion, who has spoiled, torn, and swallowed so many" Christians "from the beginning of the world."[6] Satan was the deadly aggressor in the spiritual battle.

Satan's schemes took many forms. In the first place, he was incessant in troubling Christians, and in tempting them to sin. "Satan, the prince of darkness, lays always in wait to hurt us, seeking principally to make a breach into our hearts when we stand least upon our guard," Beza warned. "Give us grace," he therefore prayed, "to be delivered from the temptations of the devil, from uncleaness . . . into which our infirmity leads us."[7] The devil also troubled Christians when they attempted to pray, "for besides that the devil at all times lies in wait, to seduce us, so does he, especially, at such times, seek to creep into our minds, to divert our thoughts elsewhere, that they may be polluted with many blemishes."[8] One of the prerequisites of fervent prayer was thus to abandon "Satan with all his baits."[9]

Only God could make Christians strong for the combat. They could not rely on their own efforts in the spiritual battle. Indeed, one of the devil's favorite schemes involved making believers think they could stand against him in their own strength: "we have to learn how Satan," Beza urged his listeners, "is never more ready for us to surrender, than when we think we have won the upper hand."[10] Rather, the omnipotent God would protect his children. "Does Satan amaze you?" Beza asked his listeners when the Genevans feared a Catholic attack in 1587.[11] If so, believers need not worry, for their Lord

> has vanquished him for you. Does the corruption of your nature astonish you? The Son of God making himself man has fully sanctified it for you. Do your sins make you afraid, which be fruits of this corruption? He has borne them all upon the tree, and has paid for your discharge. Which more is, his righteousness is yours, if he himself is yours. Are you afraid of men, if God is for you? Does death make you afraid? It is vanquished and turned into an entry of life. Behold then all your enemies scattered, behold quite under foot, all such as afflicted you within and without, because the Lord allows you for one of his servants and household.[12]

The battle was real, but God would protect his children and bring them safely to himself. Although Satan's schemes were evil and troubling, "it is not in the power of any to trouble us, except when and how far it pleases God they shall do it."[13] Thus, Beza urged his listeners to forgo trusting in their "imaginary powers" by partaking of the "real remedy" Christ modeled for them, namely, "to know prayer, provided that it is lifted up" to almighty God.[14]

The Battle for the Truth

Satan especially sought to destroy the church because God cared for it and appointed it the guardian of the truth. The devil attacked the church by trying to foster heretical beliefs in her midst. So Beza warned his listeners to be on "guard here against a great ruse of Satan, pushing us if he can, from one extreme to the other, which are so many precipices. Therefore let us know that those are grandly self-deceived who want to subjugate the word of God to their own natural sense." Instead believers must lean "on the word of God understood, and not at all on our imaginations, whether they are old or new."[15] Satan moved in those "deceived who

seek for the true religion in the crowd, in custom . . . as if there had not already been more fools than wise men." But, Beza went on to warn his listeners, "let us defend ourselves here against Satan's ambushes, and let us remember this, which the true Jesus Christ admonished us (Matt. 24:23) to know, that false christs and false prophets" would come.[16]

Biblical truth was essential. If one did not believe certain truths, one would be damned eternally. That is why Beza prayed that the church would "be my whole desire, and the sole subject of my delights, that I may never depart from there, notwithstanding whatsoever assaults and temptations I am to endure." He yearned to remain in the church in the midst of the spiritual battle because "there is not any such mishap, or so much to be feared, as to be out of this holy temple, wherein only abides all light, truth, salvation, and life."[17] The church, Beza prayed to God, was "where your truth is lodged."[18] As such, it was the locus of salvation and life. Although the truth was being assailed by the schemes of the devil, it would prevail: from true doctrine "proceeds the stability of the Church, which the endeavors of Satan cannot shake, because the foundation of her faith and doctrine is grounded upon the true, and immoveable rock, even the pure confession of the name of Christ."[19] Though Satan endeavored to destroy the church, the confession of the truth protected her in the midst of the spiritual battle.

The Eternal Stakes of the Battle

Theodore Beza's eschatological vision was eternal in its scope. He had his eyes fixed on eternity as he lived and ministered in this life. He wanted himself and those under his care to go to heaven and not to have to suffer the perpetual torments of hell.

Beza acknowledged that eternity was an awesome experience to contemplate in this life. In the prayer "upon temporal death," he exhorted persons to dwell upon the inevitability of eternity so that they might escape God's judgment and resort to Christ for salvation:

> The longest time of our course – whereof sleep nibbles away a good part – is but three-score and ten years, or four-score for the strongest bodies, while in every moment of life, the nearest and smallest danger that threatens us, seems to be death, which as our shadow, follows us at the heels, and laughs at our good devices, until she has scattered them in the wind, and brought us into ashes. But which is worse, where is the man, so holy and perfect, that does not tremble and quake, if there be represented unto him, O Lord, the tribunal seat of your sovereign justice, where we all, after death, must appear? Your indignation against sinners is manifest, and there is none righteous; your vengeance is ready against rebellion, whereof we are all guilty, which does also cause, that death is unto us, not only as a temporal ending as concerning the flesh, whereat nature is moved and abashed, but also an interior feeling of the curse fallen upon sin, yea even an entry into eternal death, unless there be for us with you our Father, redemption in our Lord Jesus Christ.[20]

So those who did not receive redemption must certainly go to "the tribunal seat of [God's] sovereign justice" and experience God's "indignation against sinners" and his "vengeance [which] is ready against rebellion."[21]

Hell's torments would be excruciating for unbelievers. "These miserable men," Beza noted, "depart this their earthly habitation, with great grief and trembling." Their eternal fate is foreshadowed

in the misery and fear they experience on the brink of death which is "the proof that they are going to make, of the eternal torments with the devils in the burning lake of fire and brimstone, which is never quenched, given to the soul presently upon the temporal death." Their "eternal death" is "a death which continues without dying." And it will not only consist in torments of body but also of conscience, for "this pain is not the least to the damned . . . that they never have any motion of the spirit to repent or convert unto you the only and true God."[22] Yes, hell will be for them an eternity of intense emotional, physical, and spiritual pain, because "when they think upon death, they see nothing but fearful, horrible, damnable, all-intolerable pain, without diminution or end, an infernal, devilish, and endless torment, a gnashing of teeth, with blasphemy and despair, a perpetual disquiet both in body and soul, an eternity to their woe and damnation." But their misery consisted of much more than that. They shall also behold "a most merciful God, whom they shall know to be in heaven, and yet not to be their God, but their adversary, and sovereign judge, to be as severe and rigorous to them, as he shall be gentle and favorable to his children."[23] Lest one argue with the deity that hell seemed an exorbitantly horrendous punishment for finite sins, Beza justified an eternal hell in Anselmian terms, "for your majesty being infinitely offended, ought also in justice to require a punishment without end."[24]

So hell should be abhorred and avoided at all costs. Conversely, Beza encouraged believers to desire and seek after heaven with their most diligent effort. Heaven was a wonderful and joyful place, where a Christian would be freed from the trials of his or her earthly pilgrimage. In heaven Christians "may once for all, wholly be set free from so miserable bondage of sin" and "they may behold [God] as it were face to face, yea and more rightly serve and honor him, whom all their lifetime they have most earnestly sought."[25] Thus Beza prayed that the Lord would allow a believer who was near death "with the eyes of his faith, to behold the eternal blessings you reserve for him in your paradise, to live happy for ever." Such a person could endure death since he knew he would soon "enjoy your presence in heaven."[26]

Having an eternal perspective fortified believers in the present spiritual battle, according to Beza. It empowered Christians to withstand the temptations of the world. "To the children of darkness," he commented, "the uncleanness of the flesh is a pleasant habitation. But to the children of light, to the immortal spirits, to the regenerate hearts, heaven is much more desirable." He thus prayed "Grant therefore, my God, that as I daily grow towards my end, so I may live the more cheerfully, learning in your school, to prefer your eternal life, before the light of the Sun, the glory of heaven, before the vanity of the earth, the glorious habitation in paradise, before the painful tumults of the world, the society of angels, before the fellowship of mortal men, the only blessed and permanent life, before the passing shadow of this life." He continued asking that he would "know how to prepare myself by continual meditation in these excellent Christian consolations, that happy are they that die in the Lord."[27] Similarly, in his prayer "For heavenly life," Beza asked the Lord "to give me grace, that withdrawing my affection more and more from the dark cloisters of the earth,

sprinkled with tears, I may lift up my desires to the lightsome habitation of thy deity, where the treasures and incomparable joys of your paradise do remain in an eternal life." He prayed that he might comfort "myself incessantly night and day, in that the promise is made unto me through my savior Jesus Christ, to the end, that in my last hour—come out of my misery and entered into my felicity—I may with a happy flight go take my rest above in your peace, O my God, which surmounts all understanding, and for to sing psalms of thanksgiving unto you without end."[28] Beza's eschatological vision thus informed all that he did and taught. God would sovereignly bring his people to heaven to be with him, but the reality of the spiritual battle meant that the believer's life on earth would be fraught with trials.

The Bible and Christian Piety

To Beza the spiritual battle necessitated *sola scriptura*. The living God had revealed himself and his ways, and continued to speak, through his word, the Bible. But, as Beza repeated continually, the devil vigorously opposed God's living voice in Scripture. If Christians were to withstand the wiles of the devil, they must be girded by truth from God. Roman Catholic, heretical, and any other human ideas that came between the individual and the Bible must be abandoned. The Bible had to be trusted and proclaimed.

The Sufficiency of the Bible

For Beza, the Bible's sufficiency derived from its authorship. The Scriptures were God's own voice to his people. As such they were authoritative and sufficient for God's people. "Does the Word contain all that which we must believe and do?" Beza asked at the head of his *Petit Catéchisme*. The necessary response was "Yes, without having any need to add anything to it or take anything from it."[29] The Bible was sufficient because God himself had written it. So, Beza argued that the eighth psalm's true meaning was found in three New Testament verses "as the Holy Ghost interprets it."[30] "The Son of God," he said elsewhere, "has left us his lively portrait in his doctrine written by the Apostles, comprising whatever is necessary for us to know, either touching his person, or touching all the counsel of God his Father concerning our salvation."[31] Similarly, in his prayer, "To crave of God the light of his word," Beza said, "you have so far graced us, that this your word of life has been, and still remains among us, faithfully collected in the sacred registers of the holy scripture, so to be unto us, the image of your glory, the law of your kingdom, the ladder of heaven, the gate of paradise, the trumpet of salvation, to be brief, the treasury of piety, virtue, wisdom, consolation, and perfection."[32]

This Bezan emphasis on God's active speaking through the Bible explains the usefulness he saw for the Scriptures in the church. Satan was active in the world, especially attacking the church. His major ploy was to entice persons to trust the power and accuracy of their unaided reason. This was a dangerous evil, Beza warned in a sermon to his students. The God-given protection against this demonic scheme, significantly, was found in biblical doctrine. Instead of following Satan's schemes, believers should "lean on the word of God understood, and not at all on our imaginations, whether they are old or new."[33]

The Scripture, God's living word, must therefore be the constant diet of his

people. Summarizing the "principal end" of Psalm 119, Beza reiterated the divine origin and the sufficiency of the Bible, as well as the vital need for God's Spirit to apply the Scriptures to Christians. The purpose of this psalm was

> that men ought to be enticed to the careful study of the heavenly doctrine. . . . And the whole doctrine may be brought to these four principal heads. (1) That those things are signified by the name of the heavenly doctrine, which are revealed of God himself, and comprehended in the holy scriptures – whether we understand that part which commands that which we ought to do, and forbids the contrary, the name of the Law being taken in a more straight signification, or whether we understand that other part, wherein it is taught what we must believe to salvation, which we call the gospel. (2) That this doctrine is declared from heaven, not that we should comprehend it in our understanding only, but that every one should follow it with an earnest care, without fainting, as the rule of his whole life. (3) That we may be both willing and able to embrace and follow it, we must of necessity pray for the Spirit of God, which may both drive away darkness from our understanding, and amend our affections that are wholly corrupted. (4) Though the world being terrified, partly with the fear of dangers, partly with the greatness of calamities, and partly also deceived with a feigned show of profit, does rather go some other way, yet they only do wisely, which stick unto that way which is set down in the word of God, what difficulties so ever do offer themselves in this life, so that at the last they shall have the fruition of true and everlasting life.[34]

To Beza the Bible was of supreme usefulness for God's people because of its divine origin. It alone contained "heavenly doctrine" from God himself.

The Bible's Role in the Spiritual Battle

As he surveyed the contemporary landscape, Beza noticed Satan's machinations behind Rome's heretical doctrines. In his sermons on the Song of Songs, for instance, Beza noted the demonic origin of Roman doctrine. He rebuked the Catholics for "their false and cursed doctrine" which they attempted to cover with "lies and falsehoods." This practice, he argued, originated with "Satan their father" and was carried on "in the school of these foxes, or rather these wolves, which are the talents and the teeth of that great monster of Rome."[35] In another place, he warned his flock to "take diligent heed of Satan's and his ministers' subtlety, who would bear us in hand that all old wine is good, and must be received: which is most false. For there is as well old wine mingled and poisoned, as new wine, which we must warily take heed of."[36] The sure antidote against such demonic poison, Pastor Beza noted, was to judge everything by the sure canon of the Bible, "to consider well whether it be drawn out of the true vessels of . . . the writings of the prophets and Apostles, otherwise called, the Old and the New Testament, and so consequently reject and refuse without all exception whatever wine is drawn elsewhere."[37] According to Theodore Beza the Bible was the weapon Christians needed to wield in the spiritual battle. The Bible was essential to Christian piety.

Difficulties of Piety in the Spiritual Battle

Assurance of salvation was a pressing pastoral reality with which Beza was very familiar. Given Beza's eschatological vision, the need for Christian assurance was great. Christians' lives here were not

their final homes. They were on a pilgrimage here; heaven was their true, eternal rest. But until they arrived in heaven, they would experience troubles, and occasional doubts about their standing with God.

Given the fact of the spiritual battle, as a wise pastor Beza knew that struggling Christians needed assurance of their future life in heaven. They needed this encouragement to keep waging the war necessary in their pilgrimage on their way to their eternal resting place. This explains, I think, the numerous *loci* of assurance that Beza delineated in his writings. As we shall see, he encouraged his flock to seek for certainty of their salvation in a variety of places. The weary pilgrims needed the solace of numerous means of finding assurance so that they would be strengthened to persevere. Ultimately, though, Beza knew that Christians would not have complete, final assurance until they were ushered safely into God's presence. Satan's wiles were too crafty, and their own indwelling sin was too powerful to allow them to have complete lasting assurance until they went to be with their Lord forever. Beza's eschatological vision thus informed his belief in the urgency, as well as the imperfection, of Christian assurance in this life.

In his paraphrase of the twenty-seventh psalm, Beza showed his readers that Christians' foes, that is, their spiritual "enemies," made assurance necessary. Although Beza here emphasized the necessity of the correct use of "means" for obtaining salvation, he also located all of the means *extra nos*:

> Here are opened unto us, even when all things seem most desperate, three lively, and never failing fountains, whence we may draw assured comfort. One is, to take hold of the power of God by true faith, and oppose it against all the boastings of the enemies. The second, a continual desire always of the glory of God, keeping evermore a safe conscience, and using diligently the means whereby our faith may be confirmed, that is to say, the hearing of the word preached and the use of the sacraments – if so be that we may have them; if not, yet must we have a continual meditation of them. The third is, earnest prayer, with faith and patience.[38]

Although Beza did not elaborate on the identity of the enemies, he did argue that the adversaries' attacks made the situation desperate for believers. In light of the attacks, Christians needed to find assured comfort. Right use of these means assured one of success against the assaults of the enemy.

Additionally, in the *Tabula Praedestinationis*, his polemical treatise defending Calvin's view of predestination, Beza noted that assurance was made necessary because of the realities of spiritual opposition.[39] After he had explicated the doctrine of predestination, Beza labored in the final chapter to show "How Individuals, with Some Profit, Can Apply This General Doctrine to Each Other."[40] Here Beza taught that assurance was necessitated by the spiritual battle. He also put forward a two-pronged basis of assurance: the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Christian and the external witness of a changed life resulting in good works. Beza's pastoral advice, since it was elaborated in this polemical and doctrinal context, is remarkable:

> So then, do you wish (whoever you are) to be assured of your predestination, and therefore the salvation you await, against all the attacks of Satan? I say, do you want to be assured, not by doubts and conjectures that assail the human mind, but as certainly and surely as

if you ascended to heaven itself and understood that secret decree from the very mouth of God? Take care, and be diligent that you do not begin at the highest stage, for otherwise you will not endure the immense light of God. Therefore, begin at the lowest stages; and when you hear God's voice resounding in your ears and heart and calling you to Christ, the only Mediator, consider step by step, and inquire carefully if you are justified and sanctified by faith in Christ. For these are the effects, and from them we understand that faith is the cause.

You will know this partly from the Spirit of adoption who inwardly cries "Abba, Father," and partly from the power and efficacy of that same Spirit within you – if, that is, you experience and also demonstrate in reality that sin, though it "dwells" in you, does not "reign" in you. But what then? Is it not the Holy Spirit who causes us spontaneously not to give free reign to our wicked and depraved desires, as those are wont to do whose eyes the Prince of this world has blinded? Who else "exhorts us to prayers," no matter how cold and sluggish we are? Who arouses in us those "inexpressible sighs"? Who implants in us after we have sinned (sometimes intentionally and knowingly) that hatred for the sins that we commit – not because we fear punishment but because we offend our most merciful Father? Who, I say, bears witness to us that our sighs are heard? Who urges us even to dare entreat God, our God, and still our Father, even after we have offended him? Is it not the Spirit, and he alone, whom "freely we received," as "freely he is given" for a sure pledge of our adoption? But if we can infer faith from these effects, we can only conclude that we are efficaciously called and drawn, and that from this calling in turn (which we have shown is peculiar to God's children) we comprehend entirely what we are seeking. We therefore were given to the Son, since we were predestined by God's eternal counsel, which he proposed in himself, to be adopted in the Son. From this it follows, in short, that since we were predestined by that most unshakable will of God, which depends on itself alone, and since "no one can snatch us from the hand of the Son," and since perseverance in faith is necessary for salvation, we have a sure expectation of our perseverance, and consequently our salvation. And therefore it is wicked to have any more doubts concerning that matter.

Consequently, it is totally wrong to say that this doctrine renders us negligent or dissolute. It is so wrong that, on the contrary, it alone gives us access to examine and even understand, by means of his Spirit, the very "depths" of God. We only know those "depths" in part as long as we sojourn here, and therefore we must daily do battle with the "heavenly weapons" against despair. . . . Furthermore, how can anyone remain firm and constant to that end, against so many dangerous internal and external temptations, and so many "strokes of chance," as the world likes to say, if he has not first established in his mind what is utterly true: that God does all things according to his good will, no matter what, or whatever instruments he uses, in the interest of his own, and that the man who is set in such a plight may number himself among "those in his book"?[41]

This lengthy quotation from a treatise defending predestination against Jérôme Bolsec's attacks demonstrates again that for Theodore Beza assurance was necessary because of eschatological reality. Knowing the proper means by which to arrive at assurance strengthened the Christian "against all the attacks of Satan." Such knowledge strengthened the believer to "daily do battle with the 'heavenly weapons' against despair." Assurance was requisite because of the spiritual battle.

Finally, in his published prayers Beza reiterated how the spiritual battle made assurance both necessary and difficult to obtain. In the preface to his *Houshold Prayers*, Beza noted that prayer itself was

often difficult for believers because of Satanic opposition. Since God wanted prayers to be fueled by affection for him, Beza urged his readers that "we must, praying carefully, lift up our hearts with a true zeal to God, banishing out all other thoughts, abandoning Satan with all his baits, opening our hearts, that our heavenly Father may thereunto infuse and pour down his blessings."[42] Later, Beza remarked that not only did a believer's indwelling corruption hinder prayerfulness, but in addition, "the devil does at all times lie in wait to seduce us. So does he, especially, at such times, seek to creep into our minds, to divert our thoughts elsewhere, that they may be polluted with many blemishes, notwithstanding that they of themselves sufficiently go astray. Yes our vanity, imperfection, and coldness, does many ways betray itself, that we may well say in one word: no man prays rightly, but he, whose mouth and mind Christ directs with his Spirit."[43] Satanic opposition was real. Prayer was a spiritual weapon to be wielded by believers against the devil.

The *Houshold Prayers* also noted the means of protection in the battle. In the fight against the devil for assurance, Christians must lean on the love and perfect character of their Heavenly Father. In one place, for example, Beza prayed, "Strengthen us likewise with your virtue, O almighty God, against the temptations and assaults of Satan, delivering us victoriously, preserving us also from such dangers and miseries, as everywhere follow us at the heels in this life . . . because we are of the number of your children."[44] In another prayer, Beza rejoiced that though Satan's schemes were bad, God's grace was more powerful: "Satan, the prince of darkness, lies always in wait to hurt us, seeking principally to make a breach into our hearts when we stand least upon our guard. But, O Almighty God, in your presence also are the thousands of angels, to watch those whom you have called to the inheritance of your salvation, of which number we believe ourselves to be, through the mercy which it has pleased you to show us. Give us grace therefore to be delivered from the temptations of the devil."[45]

For Theodore Beza assurance of salvation was necessitated by the spiritual battle raging around Christians as they made their pilgrimage to heaven. The devil made believers question their standing with God. As a pastor sensitive to the spiritual predicaments of his parishioners, Beza encouraged his listeners to seek assurance in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit would testify to them internally of their salvation, and the good works they produced in response to their salvation would serve as external proofs of the same. Their hope resided thus in God's character and the grace he had shown them and promised to continue to pour out on them for eternity. But until believers reached their final resting place in heaven, they would not have complete assurance due to the trials that inevitably attended this life.[46]

God's Sovereignty: Bedrock of Christian Piety

Beza's eschatological vision—his belief in believers' pilgrimage through a spiritual battle on their way to the eternal joy and happiness of heaven—informed his pastoral view of reality. The times were precarious. The plague constantly threatened Geneva and Catholic armies besieged the city; Lutheran antagonists repeatedly attacked the Reformed doctrine of the eucharist and predestination;

fellow believers in his beloved France suffered death under Catholic rule; the future of the Geneva Academy appeared bleak.[47] But above and behind all these concerns, Beza perceived a battle between God and Satan, a war which inevitably involved Christians. How could believers have confidence in such dangerous times? Their assurance of salvation and the certainty that they would persevere all the way to heaven, their survival in times of political turmoil, their strength in the midst of Satan's attacks, their very salvation—all these things depended on God's absolute sovereignty, according to Beza. God's sovereignty at its heart was a pastoral doctrine for Theodore Beza.

Beza's writings are replete with applications of the truth of God's sovereignty to his listeners and readers. He did not, to be sure, shy away from very technical discussions about predestination and providence in his teaching or his polemics. But his overriding concern remained the comfort and assurance of believers. The following survey of the pastoral uses Beza made of this doctrine will demonstrate that he taught that God's sovereignty was the ultimate source of joy, assurance, and salvation for Christians in the midst of the spiritual battle raging around them. God's sovereign ability to keep his promises was thus the anchor for his hurting people.

So Beza urged Gaspard de Coligny to trust in the Lord as he led the Protestants during precarious times in France. Beza exhorted his friend to be "assured of the faithful guidance of such a Guide, who will lead you through the right path, whatever difficulty there is of unknown and inaccessible places." He counseled him to rely "upon that faithful Leader, who can lead you through a sure path in the midst of impassable and inaccessible places."[48] And in the midst of evil, indeed sometimes inexplicable evil, Beza insisted that even when they did not understand God's ways, Christians must seek to trust in him and his providential control over all things. "If you see in a country oppression of the poor, and defrauding of right and equity, think not too much upon this manner of doing whatsoever men list. For he that is higher than the highest works these things, and there are that are higher then they," he wrote. Rather, he cautioned his listeners not "to begin to doubt of that providence of God. For however these things seem to be tossed up and down, as if the world had no governor, yet be sure there is one above all these, that abuse the honor whereunto they are advanced, who has also standing by him innumerable and most mighty ministers, whom in due time he may set a work to execute his decrees upon these proud men."[49] In another place, Beza wrote that "it pleases God to temper the life of man by giving sometimes prosperity, sometimes adversity," but that persons "are not able to attain to his wisdom" in these matters. The only proper course, and the only avenue open to prospering in adversity, was to rest wholly in God's wisdom: "the only means to escape out of all these straights" is "neither profanely inquiring into God himself" nor "wickedly scorning at that, which he can not conceive, but falling down before the majesty of God, which we cannot comprehend." Such persons "rest wholly in his will."[50] God would take care of his people, even when they did not understand his ways.

The schemes of Satan were especially vexing to God's people. The devil tried to keep Christians apart from Christ and incited heinous evil against believers

through those who opposed the Protestants. But God in his sovereignty would prevail over Satan and judge the wicked. In 1586 Beza described the two sorts of "mountains" that might tend to separate believers from the Lord, whom Beza identified with the "bridegroom" in his exposition of Canticles:

> For first of all Satan and his accomplices do what lies in them to hinder this bridegroom and this spouse from ever seeing each the other, leaving no kind of cruelty unpracticed, nor any kind of subtle and crafty sly means unattempted to work this division and divorce, which is verified throughout the whole sacred history. But to go no farther for proof of this, what has been done in this behalf in our time by kings and emperors enchanted and bewitched by that whore of Rome, and by her slaves? And what does the world still do every day? If we read over all the histories of the ancient persecutions, no one excepted, shall we find the like unto that which has been practiced in our time? For there is neither fire, nor water, nor air, nor earth, which have not all of them been employed to suck the life of our poor brethren. There is no kind of cruel death through which they have not passed, neither have the hands of the hangmen only been wearied with their slaughter, but the people also have been employed to drench themselves with the blood of the poor, meek and innocent, without distinction of age or difference of sex, or any privilege of nature whatsoever. And this licentiousness has been permitted, to any that would dye his hands red with innocent blood, not in time of war and hostility, but in the greatest appearance and confidence that might be of peace and friendship.[51]

In the midst of this calamity Beza encouraged his listeners to trust their Lord: "Let us therefore know and hold this for an irrefragable point and undeniable, and altogether resolved upon . . . that the Lord is never late or slack in coming, that is to say, fails not to come at the point, yea and that leaping over all that which might seem to slack and stay his coming."[52]

God's control, Beza asserted, reached right down to ordering the deeds the devil should do. Rather than causing consternation among believers, though, Beza argued that this truth should comfort them: "This doctrine is full of excellent comfort. For thereby we understand, that by the power of our God, the rage of that hungry lion is abated and bridled, and that God will never suffer him to do anything against his children, which shall not be to their good and profit, as the apostle tells us (Rom. 8:28) and also teaches us by his own example (2 Cor. 12:17)."[53]

Beza argued that God's sovereignty assured Christians of their salvation. Their Sovereign was the author of salvation from its very beginning until the time he brought his children to be with him in heaven. As believers held on to this promise, Beza argued, it would produce comfort and joy, even during times of earthly conflict. Thus Beza prayed "to obtain the gift of faith":

> So great is the vanity, ignorance, and infirmity of our nature, that if you, O most merciful God, work not that in us, which you command us to do, if you do not teach us that we may know, if you do not convert us, that we may cleave to your word, if you do not give us to your Son, that he may keep us yours, if he bring us not clothed in his righteousness to the throne of your grace, and if your spirit leads us not in the paths of your kingdom, holding us fast in the effects of his gifts, upon the way of your truth, we cannot hearken to this voice of the shepherd of our souls, neither in our hearts conceive such and so lively a faith, that all uncertainty might be banished, and the same sealed with his own efficacy: much less can we feel the

peace and joy that true faith brings with it.[54]

As he had saved them, so God would grant his children the grace to persevere, Beza argued. Believers could take great comfort in their Lord's continuing sovereign grace in their lives. "He who has obtained the gift of true faith and has trusted in that same goodness of God," Beza urged, "must also be concerned about his perseverance. Yet he should not doubt, but should rather call on God in every kind of temptation and affliction, with the sure hope of attaining what he asks, at least as far as it is expedient, since he knows himself a child of God, who cannot fail him."[55] They would persevere because God who required holiness in his people would sanctify them sovereignly as well. So Beza urged his listeners when they were troubled about their standing to call upon the Lord:

> Have recourse unto him which has made us, and who alone can make us anew, by the same power, which is his Holy Spirit, enlightening the eyes of our understanding (Eph. 1:18, Acts 26:18), framing a clean heart within us (Ps. 51:12), creating in us both to will and to do (Phil. 2:13), in a word, making us from the head to the feet new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17), that is to say, such as this spouse is set before us here to be, which is at large described unto us by Ezekiel.[56]

The grand result of God's sovereignty for a believer in this life was assurance of salvation, Beza argued. In the troubles of life, believers could trust that God, in his power, would uphold them, and they could hope that God would grant them a sense of his love:

> It may please the Lord who has drawn us out of darkness into this light of his truth, and has placed and preserved us most miraculously here in this holy rest and peace of conscience, waiting for the full accomplishment of his promises, to settle and engrave in our minds this holy assurance of his mighty power in good will towards us, that we be never astounded by the assaults of Satan, and of such his adherents as he employs and uses against us: but that contrariwise we persevere and continue in this holy profession of his truth, as well by mouth, as also by an holy and Christian life, until we come unto the real enjoying of all that, which he has made us to believe and hope for, according to his most holy and most assured promises.[57]

Ultimately, though, Beza looked forward to heaven as the answer to the vicissitudes of the earthly pilgrimage. The prospect of eternal felicity might seem remote during one's earthly life, but it was certain because of God's sovereign action on behalf of his people. So while he was praying "That we may well use afflictions," Beza exuded confidence in God's eternal goal for his people:

> Especially grant, O Lord, that I may attain to this reason of true wisdom, always to be content with your will, the sovereign and just cause of all things; namely, in that it pleases you, that the livery of your household should consist in carrying their cross after your Son, to the end, that I should never but be seasoned to drink the wholesome myrrh which purges the soul from the lusts of the flesh, and replenishes the same with the desires of eternal life. Also that I learn in whatsoever my estate, cheerfully to submit myself to the conduct of your providence, as being well assured, that whatsoever I suffer, all the crosses of my life shall be unto me so many blessings and helps from you my Father, to make me go the right way into your kingdom, and increase unto me the price of glory in the same.[58]

The wise, powerful, and loving Father

would certainly bring his children to himself for eternity. The complete sovereignty of God was the foundation of Beza's view of the Christian life. Rather than negating Christian piety, God's sovereignty provided the necessary foundation upon which Christian piety could stand, and hope.

Conclusion

This examination of Theodore Beza's piety, or "spirituality," should be helpful to us as we seek to live faithful Christian lives in our day. Though the early twenty-first century is quite different from the sixteenth century, there is a great deal of commonality between the times. The outward problems we have are unique to us. We struggle with secular culture, not Catholic and Lutheran opponents; we combat postmodernity, not Tridentine thought. But nothing of real importance has changed. Heaven and hell remain the eternal locations to which every person is going, one an existence of eternal joy, the other a place of eternal torment. Satan is still raging against God, God's truth, and God's people. The Bible remains God's inerrant word, a trustworthy guide in every facet of our earthly pilgrimage. Believers still struggle to fight the fight of faith, to live in the world without being part of it, to have our hope fixed on heaven instead of the world around us. The outward trappings may be different, but the eternal realities are constant. Most significantly for us, our God still reigns sovereignly over us, over all our concerns, and over every aspect of the universe. Beza, and the Bible, urge and challenge us to put our hope in our Sovereign Father as we seek to honor him with our lives.

ENDNOTES

[1]The best recent attempt at understanding Beza in his historical context is Scott M. Manetsch, *Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France, 1572-1598* (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, vol. 79; Leiden: Brill, 2000). More generally on Beza's life see Henry Martyn Baird, *Theodore Beza: The Counsellor of the French Reformation, 1519-1605* (1899; reprint, New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), Paul-F. Geisendorf, *Théodore de Bèze* (Geneva: Alexandre Jullien, 1967), Jill Raitt, "Theodore Beza," in *Shapers of Religious Traditions in Germany, Switzerland, and Poland, 1560-1600* (ed. Jill Raitt; New Haven: Yale University, 1981), 89-104; and Richard A. Muller, "Theodore Beza," in *The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period* (ed. Carter Lindberg; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 213-24.

[2]R. T. Kendall argued for this thesis clearly: "The one man more than any other who was the architectural mind for English Calvinism was Calvin's successor at Geneva, Theodore Beza (1519-1605). Beza perhaps would not have wanted his theology to be known as Calvinism, but his systematizing and logicalizing theology had the effect of perpetuating a phenomenon that bore Calvin's name but was hardly Calvin's purest thought" ("The Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology," in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World* [ed. W. Stanford Reid; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], 201). See also Basil Hall, "Calvin Against the Calvinists," in *John Calvin*, (Courtenay Studies in Reformation Theology 1; ed. G. E. Duffield; Appleford: Sutton Courtenay, 1966), 19-37; and Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism*

and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 32-33, 38-39, 41-42. Armstrong explained, "This new outlook [Beza's method] represents a profound divergence from the humanistically oriented religion of John Calvin and most of the early reformers. The strongly biblically and experientially based theology of Calvin and Luther had, it is fair to say, been overcome by the metaphysics and deductive logic of a restored Aristotelianism" (*Calvinism*, 32).

An unqualified adoption of the "Calvin versus Beza" thesis in two recent surveys of historical theology proves its continuing popularity. Thus Alister McGrath followed Armstrong's schema of scholasticism and made this judgment about the post-Calvin Reformed theologians: "It seems to be a general rule of history that periods of enormous creativity are followed by eras of stagnation. The Reformation is no exception." And Beza's works "present a rationally coherent account of the main elements of Reformed theology, using Aristotelian logic" (Alister McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1998], 169, 172). Roger Olson's negative judgment of Beza's contribution is even starker: "Many of the Reformed scholastics like Beza were fascinated with questions about the decrees of God. . . . Beza and other post-Calvin Reformed theologians began to wonder and speculate about the 'order of the divine decrees.' . . . Beza and certain other Calvinists were obsessed with the doctrine of predestination more than Calvin himself ever had been" (Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999], 456-57).

[3]For fuller discussion see Shawn D. Wright, *Our Sovereign Refuge: The Pastoral Theology of Theodore Beza* (Studies in Christian History and Thought; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004). Much of this article is based on material found in *Our Sovereign Refuge*.

[4]Much has recently been written on the meaning of "Christian spirituality." See, for example, Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 1-24. Protestants preferred the word "piety" to "spirituality," because the latter suggested Catholic notions of works-righteousness, they thought. On the distinction between piety and spirituality see Jill Raitt, "Saints and Sinners: Roman Catholic and Protestant Spirituality in the Sixteenth Century," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation* (ed. Jill Raitt; World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest, vol. 17; New York: Crossroad, 1987), 454-63. Calvin's major rubric for conceiving of the Christian life was a particular understanding of piety, an understanding that Beza seems to have adopted. On Calvin's view of piety, see Ford Lewis Battles, "True Piety According to Calvin," in his *Interpreting John Calvin* (ed. Robert Benedetto; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 289-306, and Joel R. Beeke, "Calvin on Piety," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 125-52.

[5]Compare Manetsch's opinion that when Beza referred to Protestants' opponents as "Satan" his "use of biblical images like these often served as a barometer of his angst and anger. When the reformer wished to express his deepest pain, frustration, or indignation, he frequently appealed to scriptural characters and concepts, interpreting the data of his experience in light of the biblical drama of God's chosen people struggling against Satan and his minions" (*Theodore Beza*, 53-54).

[6]Theodore Beza, *Christian Meditations upon Eight Psalmes of the Prophet David* (London: Christopher Barker, 1582), on Psalm 102:8.

[7]Theodore Beza, *Maister Bezaes Houshold Prayers* (trans. John Barnes; London: n.p., 1603), P3r-P3v.

[8]Ibid., B6r.

[9]Ibid., B5v.

[10]Theodore Beza, *Sermons sur l'Histoire de la Passion et Sepulture de nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ, descrite par les quatre Evangelistes* (Geneva: Jean le Preux, 1592), 197.

[11]Jill Raitt, "Beza, Guide for the Faithful Life," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986): 97-98.

[12]Beza, *Christian Meditations*, on Ps 143:12.

[13]Theodore Beza, *Master Bezaes Sermons Upon the Three First Chapters of the Canticle of Canticles* (trans. John Harmar; Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1587), 236.

[14]Beza, *Sermons sur la Passion*, 129.

[15]Ibid., 437.

[16]Ibid., 325-26.

[17]Beza, *Houshold Prayers*, G2v-G3r.

[18]Ibid., G1r.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid., in the prayer "Upon temporal death."

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid., N2v-N3v.

[23]Ibid., N1v-N2r.

[24]Ibid., Q5v.

[25]Theodore Beza, *Job Expounded by Theodore Beza, Partly in Manner of a Commentary, Partly in Manner of a Paraphrase* (Cambridge: n.p., 1589), on Job 3.

[26]Beza, *Houshold Prayers*, in the prayer, "At the visitation of the sick."

[27]Ibid., in the prayer "Upon temporal death."

[28]Ibid., in the prayer "For heavenly life."

[29]Theodore Beza, *Petit Catechisme, C'est a dire, Sommaire Instruction de la Religion Chrestienne. Latin-François, par Theodore de Beze* (n.p.: n.d., 238). See also the English translation, *A Little Catechisme, That is to Say, A Short Instruction Touching Christian Religion* (London: Hugh Singleton, 1579), A.1.

[30]Theodore Beza, *The Psalmes of David, truly opened and explaned by Paraphrasis, according to the right sense of everie Psalme. With large and ample Arguments before everie Psalme, declaring the true use thereof* (trans. Anthonie Gilbie; London: Henrie Denham, 1581), 11.

[31]Beza, *Canticles*, 31.

[32]Beza, *Houshold Prayers*, in the prayer "To crave of God the light of his word."

[33]Beza, *Sermons sur la Passion*, 438.

[34]Beza, *Psalmes*, 284-85.

[35]Beza, *Canticles*, 290.

[36]Ibid., 230.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Beza, *Psalmes*, 44.

[39]The best discussion of Beza's *Tabula* is Richard A. Muller, "The Use and Abuse of a Document: Beza's *Tabula Praedestinationis*, The Bolsec Controversy, and the Origins of Reformed Orthodoxy," in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (eds. Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 33-61.

[40]Theodore Beza, *Tabula Praedestinationis*, in *The Potter and the Clay: The Main Predestination Writings of Theodore Beza* (trans. Philip C. Holtrop; Grand Rapids: Calvin College, 1982), 80.

[41]Ibid., 80-82.

[42]Beza, *Houshold Prayers*, B5v.

[43]Ibid., B6r-B6v.

[44]Ibid., O3r-O3v.

[45]Ibid., P3r-P3v.

[46]One of the ways some scholars maintain that Beza changed Calvin's theology relates to the Christian's quest for assurance of salvation. Calvin, they say, found assurance by looking to Christ for forgiveness. Beza changed the focus to the Christian's works, introducing the "practical syllogism," and thus robbed believers of certainty of salvation. Nothing could be further from the truth as I show in *Our Sovereign Refuge*, 199-225.

[47]Note Monter's helpful observations in this regard:

> "The external history of the Republic of Geneva was extremely eventful during the forty years after Calvin's death. Isolated geographically from Bern, the city was forced to go farther afield and seek more secure guarantees for her independence. The course of her diplomatic activities became more intense; their goals, more serious. Finally, by the end of the sixteenth century, Geneva had to fight a four-year war with the Duke of Savoy. Even afterwards, no definitive peace was concluded. Only when Geneva repulsed a surprise attack from Savoy (the famous Escalade of December 1602, which is still celebrated annually in Geneva) did she attain some measure of political security" (E. William Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* [New York: John Wily and Sons, 1967; repr., Huntington, NY: Robert E. Kreiger, 1975], 194).

Compare Jill Raitt's comment that "the political history of Europe in the last quarter of the sixteenth century is a complex weave out of which it is not easy to pluck the pertinent threads" (*The Colloquy of Montbéliard: Religion and Politics in the Sixteenth Century* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 45).

[48]Theodore Beza, *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze* (ed. H. Meylan, A. Dufour, C. Chimelli, and B. Nicollier; Geneva: Librarie Droz, 1970), 6:19.

[49]Theodore Beza, *Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher. Solomons Sermon Made to the people, teaching every man howe to order his life, so as they may come to true and everlasting happines. With a Paraphrase, or short exposition thereof, made by Theodore Beza* (Cambridge: n.p., n.d.), on Eccl 5:8.

[50]Ibid., C4-C5.

[51]Beza, *Canticles*, 246-47.

[52]Ibid., 247.

[53]Beza, *Job*, on Job 1:6.

[54]Beza, *Houshold Prayers*, in the prayer "To obtain the gift of faith."

[55]Beza, *Tabula*, in *The Potter and the Clay*, 58.

[56]Beza, *Canticles*, 36-37.

[57]Ibid., 358.

[58]Beza, *Houshold Prayers*, K3v-K4v.

"Draw Nigh unto My Soul": English Baptist Piety and the Means of Grace in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

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Among the foremost examples of vital Christianity found in the history of the church are the Puritans, those godly Christians who lived in Great Britain and New England between the 1560s and the end of the seventeenth century. Skilled navigators on the ocean of Christian living, the Puritans rightly discerned that, in the words of Elizabethan Puritan Richard Greenham (1540-1594), "we drawe neere to God by meanes."[1] By this Greenham, speaking for his fellow Puritans, meant that there are various "means of godliness" or spiritual disciplines by which God enables Christians to grow in Christ till they reach the haven of heaven. The Puritans could refer to a number of such means of piety, but there were three that were especially regarded as central by this tradition of piety: prayer, the Scriptures, and the sacraments or ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Thus Richard Greenham could state, "The first meanes [of grace] is prayer.... The second meanes is hearing of his word.... The third meanes whereby we draw neere, is by the Sacraments."[2]

Now Baptists are the children of Puritanism, and the family connection between the two is nowhere seen more clearly than in Baptist thinking about piety. Just as the Puritans were primarily men and women intensely passionate about piety and Christian experience, so spirituality lies at the very core of the English Baptist movement during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For example, Baptists in this era were adamant that keeping in step with the Spirit was *the* vital matter when it came to the nourishment of the soul of the believer or the sustenance of the inner life of a congregation. As the late eighteenth-century English Baptist John Sutcliff (1752-1814) of Olney, Buckinghamshire, rightly observed,

> [T]he outpouring of the divine Spirit…is the grand promise of the new testament.... His influences are the soul, the great animating soul of all religion. These withheld, divine ordinances are empty cisterns, and spiritual graces are withering flowers. These suspended, the greatest human abilities labour in vain, and the noblest efforts fail of success.[3]

Yet, these Baptists were also certain that to seek the Spirit's strength apart from various means through which the Spirit worked was both unbiblical and foolish. Benjamin Keach (1640-1704), the most significant Baptist theologian of the late seventeenth century, put it this way in 1681 when, in a direct allusion to the Quakers, who dispensed with the ordi-

nances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, he declared,

> Many are confident they have the Spirit, Light, and Power, when 'tis all meer [*sic*] Delusion. …Some Men boast of the Spirit, and conclude they have the Spirit, and none but they, and yet at the same time cry down and villify his blessed Ordinances and Institutions, which he hath left in his Word, carefully to be observed and kept, till he comes the second time without Sin unto Salvation. …The Spirit hath its proper Bounds, and always runs in its spiritual Chanel [*sic*], *viz*. The Word and Ordinances, God's publick [*sic*] and private Worship.[4]

Keach here mentions two central spiritual disciplines or means of piety: the Word and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

In the following century, Benjamin Beddome (1717-1795), the pastor of the Baptist cause in Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire for fifty-five years, discerned in the phrase "Draw nigh unto my soul" (Ps 69:18) four ways in which God draws near to his people, the first three of which are what can be called means of grace and are identical to the means of grace listed by the Puritan Richard Greenham and which have been noted above. God draws near to us and we to him in prayer, Beddome says, in "hearing the Word," in the ordinances and also, he added, in "the time of affliction" and death.[5] While these Baptists knew of other means of grace—for example, Christian friendship and the making of personal and corporate covenants—the first three were undoubtedly central. Let us look at each of them in turn.

"The Compass of the Word"

Shaped by their Reformation and Puritan roots, Baptists have historically been characterized by a spirituality of the Word. To use a description coined by Alister McGrath, Baptists have been "Word-centred evangelicals."[6] This spirituality was based on the affirmation of the infallibility of the Scriptures. As a 1651 Baptist tract against the Quakers has it, the Bible is "the infallible word of God…declaring his mind, making known his counsel, being able to make the people of God wise unto salvation."[7] Thus, because this was the nature of the Scriptures, they were to be central to the piety of the believer. A statement by the prominent London Baptist William Kiffin (1616-1701) well captures this fact when he states about a fellow Baptist, John Norcott (1621-1676),

> He steered his whole course by the compass of the word, making Scripture precept or example his constant rule in matters of religion. Other men's opinions or interpretations were not the standard by which he went; but, through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, he laboured to find out what the Lord himself had said in his word.[8]

Given this prominence of the Scriptures in the life of Baptists, it is not surprising that hearing the Word preached was regarded by them as a vital spiritual discipline and *the* pre-eminent aspect of worship. For instance, in the association records of the Northern Baptist Association, which was composed of Baptist churches in the old English counties of Northumberland, Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Durham, we read the following answer to a question raised in 1701 as to who may administer the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and Baptism: "Those Persons that the Church approves of to Preach the Gospel we think it safe to Approve likewise for ye Administering other Ordinances *Preaching being the*

greater work." In 1703, when a similar question was asked, it was stated that "those whom the Church Approves to preach the Gospel may also Administer the Ordinances of Baptism and the Lords Supper *Preaching being the main and principall* [*sic*] *Work of the Gospel*."[9] English Baptist scholar Christopher J. Ellis thus rightly speaks of the "dominance of preaching in Baptist worship."[10]

The architecture of early English Baptist churches also bespoke this emphasis on the preached word in worship: *the* central feature of these simple structures was the pulpit. In the words of D. Mervyn Himbury, early Baptist chapels were "meeting houses designed for preaching."[11] These meeting-houses were generally square or rectangular structures, some of them from the outside even resembling barns.[12] Inside the meeting-house the pulpit was made prominent and was well within the sight and sound of the entire congregation. Sometimes a sounding board was placed behind the pulpit so as to help project the preacher's voice throughout the building. There was a noticeable lack of adornment in Baptist meeting-houses, with nothing to distract the attention of the worshippers. During the eighteenth century, large clear windows were provided so that light was available to all to read the Scriptures as the Word of God was expounded.[13]

Given the prominence attached to preaching by verbal and architectural statement, it should occasion no surprise to find leading English Baptist preachers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries emphasizing that good preaching required hard work and preparation. Hercules Collins (d.1702), the pastor of Wapping Baptist Church, London, from 1676 till his death, could state in his *The Temple Repair'd* (1702) that "he doth the best Work and the most Work, that labours most in his Study, with a dependance upon God for a Blessing."[14] While Collins was well aware that ultimately it was the Spirit that made men preachers of the gospel—"tho it be granted," he wrote in the same work, "that human Literature is very useful for a Minister, yet it is not essentially necessary; but to have the Spirit of Christ to open the Word of Christ is essentially necessary"[15]—yet study was still vital. There were some, he noted, that "think it unlawful to study to declare God's Mind, and will contemptuously speak against it, as if we were to preach by Inspiration, as the Prophets and Apostles of old did." In response to such reasoning, Collins cited 2 Tim 2:15 and asked "What can be a better Confutation of those Men than [this] Text? which commands Ministers to study to shew themselves good Workmen."[16]

Many of the better preachers of that day were, of course, able to preach with little preparation, if the need arose. Benjamin Beddome was once asked to preach at Fairford in the Coswolds, where a Thomas Davis was the pastor. Beddome, who was a very powerful preacher but naturally quite timid, completely forgot his sermon as it came time to preach. Having no notes, he understandably became somewhat agitated. Leaning over Davis on the way to the pulpit from where he had been sitting, he asked anxiously, "Brother Davis, what must I preach from?" Davis, thinking that Beddome was not in earnest and actually joking, curtly replied, "Ask no foolish questions." Davis' reply gave Beddome great relief. When he came to the pulpit he turned the congregation to Titus 3:9, and proceeded to preach upon the clause found there, "Avoid foolish questions." It was a sermon that hearers

said was "remarkably methodical, correct, and useful"![17]

In *A Temple Repair'd* Collins also gave instructions regarding the best way in which to shape the sermon. Attention first had to be given to the context of the verse or verses being preached upon and difficult terms in the passage explained. Then what the passage taught in terms of doctrine had to be made fully clear and established by reference to parallel texts of Scripture. Finally how the doctrinal teaching applied to the hearers' lives was to be set forth.[18]

Among the various additional directions that the London pastor gave regarding preaching, Collins emphasized that the preacher's speech must be

> plain, as Paul's was. Not with enticing Words of Man's Wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of Power [1 Corinthians 2:4]. Use sound Words that cannot be condemned. Rhetorical Flashes are like painted Glass in a Window, that makes a great show, but darkens the Light… The Prophets and Apostles generally spoke in the vulgar and common Languages which the ordinary People understood: They did not only speak to the Understanding of a King upon the Throne, but to the Understanding of the meanest Subject.[19]

This emphasis on plainness and simplicity in preaching continued throughout the century. Andrew Fuller (1754-1815), the renowned Baptist theologian and pastor of the Baptist cause in Kettering, insisted in his *Thoughts on Preaching*, written towards the end of the eighteenth century, that while "sound speech" and "good sense" ought to characterize preaching, the preacher should never aspire after "fine composition" and "great elegance of expression." The latter might "amuse and please the ears of a few," but it will not "profit the many." And here Fuller has in mind those from the poorer classes who did not have the benefit of a literary education and who made up the bulk of Baptist congregations throughout the era we are considering.[20]

Coxe Feary (1759-1822), who pastored a Baptist work in an obscure little village called Bluntisham, then in Huntingdonshire, held similar convictions. Writing in the autumn of 1802 to a friend who was studying at the Bristol Baptist Academy, the sole Baptist seminary in England at the time for training men for pastoral ministry, Feary counseled him, "I hope you make a point of studying two sermons every week, that you disuse your notes as much as possible in the pulpit, and that you constantly aim to be the *useful*, more than the *refined*, preacher." Feary went on to explain that in giving this advice, he certainly did not want his friend to stoop to using "vulgar" speech in his sermons, that is, common slang. Rather, he wanted him "to commend [himself] to every man's conscience in the sight of God, and to the understanding of [his] hearers." In other words, his sermons should be easily understood by all of his hearers. In this way, he would be a "useful" preacher and "an able minister of the New Testament."[21]

This type of preaching was not only advocated because it was in line with that of the Apostolic era, but also because the English Baptists generally believed that it was through the mind that God appealed to the hearts and wills of human beings. Benjamin Beddome brings this out most clearly in a sermon that he preached on 2 Cor 5:11a ("Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men"). Beddome was convinced that the word "persuade" lay at the heart of preaching. Since men

and women are "endowed with reason and understanding," they are "capable of being persuaded" and reasoned with. Thus, we find the Apostle Paul reasoning "with the Jews out of the Scriptures," that is, laying before them "the evidences of truth" and endeavouring to "remove their prejudices against it by solid argument." Consequently, a "minister is not to address himself to the passions, but to the understanding of his hearers." Beddome, of course, did not disapprove of the presence of emotions. Sermons must be delivered, he argued, with "warmth of affection, earnestness of expression, and unwearied assiduity." As such, they will undoubtedly kindle the affections of the hearers. But, it must be recognized that emotion is also quite fickle, and can "quickly vanish away, and leave no permanent effect."[22] It simply cannot form the foundation of a Christian lifestyle, let alone serve as the basis for believers' "life together."

It should be noted that the English Baptists of this era never lost sight of the fact that, just as it is the Spirit alone who makes preachers, so it is the Spirit who alone can empower the words of the preacher and make them efficacious to the winning of the lost and the building up of God's people. In the words of Benjamin Beddome:

> Ministers lift up their voice, and God makes bare his arm; ministers persuade, and God enables, nay, constrains, men to comply.… Ministers stand at the door and knock; the Spirit comes with his key, and opens the door.[23]

Finally, an excellent vantage-point from which to view English Baptist thought on hearing the Word of God as a means of grace is a text written by Robert Hall, Jr. (1764-1831), one of the most renowned preachers in England during the final couple of decades of the "long" eighteenth century. At the annual meeting of the Northamptonshire Association in 1813 Robert Hall had agreed to write the following year's circular letter for the Association which was to be on the subject of *Hearing the Word*.

Hall began the circular letter by observing that preaching is "an ordinance of God." What he meant by this phrase is explained later in the letter, when Hall stated that preaching has been especially appointed by God to bring spiritual blessings to God's people.[24] The Baptist author can also describe preaching as a "means of grace," that is, a "consecrated channel" through which God's spiritual mercies flow. In other words, preaching is one of the means by which the Holy Spirit extends the kingdom of God. Thus, "where the gospel is not preached," the effects of the Spirit's work are "rarely to be discerned." This was not only a theological conviction held by Hall, but also one that he believed could be readily discerned from a perusal of the history of God's dealing with humanity: "in all ages, it appears that the Spirit is accustomed to follow in the footsteps of his revealed Word."[25] Christian spirituality and biblical spiritual experience are thus vitally dependent on the preaching of the Word. Where preaching is absent, Hall is convinced that the former is unlikely to be found.

Further on in the letter, Hall likens the person who hears the Word preached and refuses to apply it to his or her life to an individual who goes to a feast, spends his or her time reflecting on how the food has been prepared and how it is ideally suited for the other guests, but tastes not a morsel. It is not fortuitous that Hall

should choose such an illustration. It well reveals the very high regard in which preaching was held by him and his fellow Baptists. The opportunity to hear the Word preached was nothing less than a feast that God provided for the soul. As Hall went on to say, "the Word of God is the food of souls," giving them "strength and refreshment."[26]

"A Garden Enclosed": The Spirituality of Baptism

Up until the beginning of the twentieth century the various types of Baptists—Calvinistic, General (that is, Arminian), and Seventh-day—were the only major denominations in Great Britain that insisted upon believer's baptism. The Anglicans, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and the Methodists all upheld infant baptism, while the Quakers dispensed with the rite altogether. Moreover, since few Baptist churches prior to 1800 possessed an indoor baptistery, baptism was usually done outdoors in a pond, stream, or river where all and sundry could come and watch.[27] The Baptists were thus provided with excellent opportunities to bear witness to their distinct convictions and their commitment to Christ. For example, at the formation of a small Calvinistic Baptist congregation in Redruth, Cornwall, in August 1802, four individuals were publicly baptized. According to an account written in the church records by the first pastor, F. H. Rowe, the day

> was one of those enchanting days when the sun clears the atmosphere of every cloud, not a leaf appeared to vibrate on the trees, or the smallest undulations be formed on the pool. We had selected a spot well suited for the purpose. It was the vale that lies between the bridge known by the name of "Blowing House Bridge" and the celebrated Carn Brea Hill. Owing to the excavations occasioned by the searching for ore, a large amphitheatre was formed. On this spot stood an immense concourse of people. The general impression was their number consisted of 15,000. No one but an eye-witness can conceive the pleasure derived from the sight of four believers in Christ taking up the easy yoke of their Master in the presence of so many.[28]

Not surprisingly Andrew Fuller observed that public baptisms had often been a vehicle for impressing upon many individuals "their first convictions of the reality of religion."[29] However, the public nature of the rite also exposed Baptists to ridicule and censure. James Butterworth, who pastored at Bromsgrove near Birmingham from 1755 to 1794, could state at a baptismal service in 1774, "Baptism is a thing so universally despised, that few can submit to it, without apparent danger to their temporal interest; either from relations, friends, masters, or others with whom they have worldly connections."[30] A couple of days after Andrew Fuller had been baptized in the spring of 1770 he met a group of young men while he was riding through the fields near his home in Soham. "One of them," he later recorded, "called after me, in very abusive language, and cursed me for having been 'dipped'."[31]

In 1778 Joseph Jenkins (1743-1819), who served as the pastor of Baptist causes in Wrexham, Wales, and in London, refuted a series of unfounded charges against the Baptists, including the assertions that they conducted baptisms in the nude, that they baptized "women apparelled in a *single* garment," and that they even immersed women in the final stages of pregnancy.[32] This accusation that the Baptist practice of immersion involved

immodesty was one that had been common since the emergence of the English Baptists in the mid-seventeenth century. For instance, their first doctrinal standard, the *First London Confession of Faith* (1644), was issued in part to rebut the charge that the Baptists of that time were involved in "doing acts unseemly in the dispensing the Ordinance of Baptism, not to be named amongst Christians."[33]

Baptist works responding to these attacks on believer's baptism invariably devoted large sections to proving that believers, never infants, are the proper subjects of baptism and that they should be baptized by immersion, and not by any other mode. The equally important subject of the meaning of baptism was consequently often overlooked.[34] A notable exception in this regard was a circular letter written by Andrew Fuller for the Northamptonshire Association in 1802. Entitled *The Practical Uses of Christian Baptism*, it took for granted the standard Baptist position on the right subjects of baptism and the proper mode in which it is to be administered, and concentrated on outlining the meaning and significance of the rite. In Fuller's words, he desired to focus his readers' attention on "the influence of this ordinance, where it produces its proper effects, in promoting piety in individuals, and purity in the church."[35]

At the time when Fuller wrote this tract he was the pastor of the Baptist cause in Kettering, Northamptonshire, where he had been since 1782. Raised in a household of farmers, he was a big, broad-shouldered man who had little formal education and looked, to William Wilberforce (1759-1833) at least, as "the very picture of a village blacksmith."[36] Yet, in the words of Benjamin Davies (1814-1875), the Welsh Old Testament scholar who served as the first principal of Canada Baptist College in Montreal, though Fuller "began to preach when very unlearned," he "was so sensible of his disadvantages that he used great diligence to acquire that knowledge, without which he could never be, what he at length became, one of the most valuable men of his time, and decidedly the most useful minister in our religious community."[37] Not without reason did another Welsh Baptist call him "the Elephant of Kettering."[38]

Fuller began *The Practical Uses of Christian Baptism* by maintaining that the principal reason why God instituted this ordinance is that it might serve as a "solemn and practical profession of the Christian religion." As an "open profession" of the name of Christ, baptism is nothing less than an "oath of allegiance to the King of Zion." Baptism is a "sign" to believers that they have "solemnly surrendered [themselves] up to Christ, taking him to be [their] Prophet, Priest, and King; engaging to receive his doctrine, to rely on his atonement, and to obey his laws."[39] In a letter that he had written a couple of years earlier to William Ward (1769-1823), the Serampore missionary, Fuller developed this idea of baptism as the place of openly professing submission to Christ.

> The importance of this ordinance [of baptism]…arises from its being the distinguishing sign of Christianity—that by which they [i.e., Christians] were to be known, acknowledged, and treated as members of Christ's visible kingdom: "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ," Gal. iii.27. It is analogous to a soldier on his enlisting into his Majesty's service putting on the military dress. The Scriptures lay great stress upon "confessing Christ's name before men" (Matt. x.32); and baptism is one of the most distinguished ways of doing this. When a man becomes

> a believer in Christ, he confesses it usually in words to other believers: but the appointed way of confessing it openly to the world is by being baptized in his name.[40]

Christianity, Fuller went on to observe in the circular letter, contains both "truths to be believed" and "precepts to be obeyed." And in a marvellous way, the rite of baptism provides encouragement for believers to be faithful in adhering to both. First, since baptism is to be carried out, according to Matthew 28:19, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," submission to the ordinance entails an avowal of the fact that God is a triune Being. Well acquainted with the history of the early Church, Fuller rightly stated that this baptismal formula was widely used in that era to argue for the doctrine of the Trinity.[41] As Fuller noted, to relinquish the doctrine of the Trinity is tantamount to the virtual renunciation of one's baptism.[42]

Baptism into the Triune name also entails a commitment to the belief that salvation is the joint work of all three members of the Godhead: the Father's sovereign election, the Son's "all-sufficient atonement," and the sanctifying work wrought by the Spirit. In particular, though, it points to Christ's saving work. In Fuller's words,

> The immersion of the body in water, which is a purifying element contains a profession of our faith in Christ, through the shedding of whose blood we are cleansed from all sin. Hence, baptism in the name of Christ is said to be *for the remission of sins*. Not that there is any virtue in the element, whatever be the quantity; nor in the ceremony, though of Divine appointment: but it contains a *sign* of the way in which we must be saved. Sin is washed away in baptism in the same sense as Christ's flesh is eaten, and his blood drank, in the Lord's supper: the sign, when rightly used leads to the thing signified. Remission of sins is ascribed by Peter not properly to baptism, but to the *name* in which the parties were to be baptized. Thus also Saul was directed to wash away his sins, *calling on* the name of the Lord.[43]

Fuller here points out that in itself the act of immersion possesses no salvific value. But it "contains a sign" or illustration of the way of salvation and "the sign, when rightly used"—that is, when accompanied by sincere faith—"leads to the thing signified." The statement "leads to the thing signified" must then mean that when the person being baptized has such a faith, then baptism in some way confirms this faith and the individual's share in the benefits of the gospel. Fuller does not develop this thought. But if he had, he might well have developed it along the lines of his earlier statement to William Ward which has been cited above: "When a man becomes a believer in Christ, he confesses it usually in words to other believers: but the appointed way of confessing it openly to the world is by being baptized in his name." In other words, baptism is the place where conversion to Christ is ratified and, to borrow a phrase from another great English Baptist theologian of the eighteenth century, John Gill (1697-1771), "faith discovers itself."[44]

Fuller proceeded to explain that Christ experienced "the deluge of [God's] wrath" due the sins of fallen men and women, but rose "triumphantly from the dead." Fallen men and women are saved solely on the basis of his death and resurrection. Baptism, which involves both immersion and emersion, is thus an extremely apt "sign" or "outward and formal expression of genuine personal faith" in Christ's saving work.[45]

Not only does baptism speak of cardinal "truths to be believed," but it also teaches disciples of Christ how to live in a God-honoring way. On the basis of Rom 6:3-4 Fuller argued that baptism is a sign to the baptized disciple that he or she has been baptized into Christ's death and thus united with him in his death. There is, of course, a difference between the death of Christ and that of the disciple: Christ died *for* sin, the disciple is to die *to* sin. When he or she is baptized, therefore, there is a commitment made to die to sin and to the world.[46]

Baptism thus serves as a "hedge" that God sets around his people, which "tends more than a little to preserve [them] from temptation."[47] This comparison of baptism to a hedge brings to mind a favored image for the church in seventeenth and eighteenth century English Baptist circles, namely, the enclosed garden. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Fuller explicitly employing this image a little further on in this circular letter. He has been arguing that believer's baptism was originally designed to be "the boundary of visible Christianity," the line of distinction between "the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan." Where the original design of this distinguishing ordinance is ignored, and "persons admitted to baptism without any profession of personal religion, or upon the profession of others on their behalf," then "the church will be no longer a garden enclosed, but an open wilderness, where every beast of prey can range at large."[48]

This description of the church as "a garden enclosed" has roots both in Scripture and English horticulture. First of all, the phrase is drawn directly from the Song of Solomon 4:12 (KJV): "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." Enclosed gardens, though, were also a feature common to the landscape of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England. While some of these gardens were developed for aesthetic reasons and consisted primarily of flowers and shrubs, many of them were kitchen gardens, designed to produce small fruits, herbs, salad greens and other vegetables. Generally rectangular in shape, they were enclosed by walls, fences or hedges that might reach as high as sixteen feet. These walls provided both protection from the cooling effects of the wind and privacy for the owner.[49]

Two examples must suffice to illustrate the way in which this image was employed in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English Baptist tradition. Benjamin Keach used this image to argue that

> God hath out of the people of this world, taken his churches and walled them about, that none of the evil beasts can hurt them: all mankind naturally were alike dry and barren, as a wilderness, and brought forth no good fruit. But God hath separated some of this barren ground, to make lovely gardens for himself to walk and delight in. …the church of Christ, is a garden inclosed, or a community of christians distinct from the world: 'A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse.' Cant. iv.12.[50]

As an "enclosed garden" of God's creation, the church is to be a fruitful haven set apart and distinct from the wilderness of the world.

My second example comes from the early years of the Evangelical Revival when many English and Welsh Baptists were anything but receptive to the revival. William Herbert (1697-1745), a Welsh Baptist pastor and a friend of the Calvinistic Methodist preacher Howel Harris (1714-

1773), was critical of the latter's decision to stay in the Church of England. In a letter that he wrote to Harris early in 1737, a couple of years after the Evangelical Revival had begun in England and Wales, Herbert likened the Church of England to a pub "which is open to all comers," and to a "common field where every noisesome beast may come." Surely Harris realized, Herbert continued, that the Scriptures—and he has in mind the Song of Solomon 4:12—describe God's church as "a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed," in other words, a body of believers "separate from the profane world"?[51]

Thus, in using this description of the church as "a garden enclosed" and linking baptism with it, Fuller was re-affirming the fact that at the heart of the Baptist tradition was a radical Nonconformity. And it was a Nonconformity that was much more than a protest with regard to what was perceived as the unscriptural nature of some of the rites of the Church of England. "Nonconformity to the ceremonies of the church [of England] is of no account," Fuller said on another occasion, "if it be attended with conformity to the world."[52] For Fuller, believer's baptism spoke of a fundamental break with the forces that sought to press the heart and mind into the mould of this present age.

Fuller was careful to stress in his circular letter, though, that the "religion of Jesus does not consist in mere negatives." Baptism signifies not only death, but also resurrection. The "emersion of the body from the waters of baptism is a sign" of entrance into "a new state of being" where the baptized believer should now be "alive to God." Consequently, baptism is never to be regarded as "merely a sign" and nothing more or simply "an unmeaning ceremony." It is a meaning-laden ordinance, which bears witness to the most radical transformation a human being can undergo in this world.[53]

As Fuller concluded the letter, he wisely reminded his readers that obedience to this ordinance is never to be regarded as "a substitute for a life of holiness and universal righteousness." He referred them to the pointed reminder that the Apostle Paul gave to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians. When "they trifled with idolatry and worldly lusts," they could not look to their participation in the privileges of baptism and the Lord's Supper to secure them from God's anger. Thus, to hope that believer's baptism can guarantee a life of spiritual fruitfulness is to deceive oneself. "It is the presence of Christ only that can keep us alive, either as individuals or as churches."[54] Ultimately, the disciple is called to cling to Christ, not to a set of rites or even doctrines.

The "Sweet Repast" of the Lord's Table

Another place that Baptists have historically regarded as being rich in spiritual nourishment is the ordinance of the Lord's Table. This may come as a surprise to many Baptists, who in recent times do not appear to have seen participation at the Table as an important spiritual discipline. Any talk about the Lord's Supper nourishing the soul they have tended to write off as Roman Catholic. But it was not always so.

Ernest A. Payne, the doyen of English Baptist historical studies for much of the twentieth century, has maintained that from the beginning of Baptist testimony in the seventeenth century there has never been unanimity with respect to the nature of the Lord's Supper and that no one per-

spective can justly claim to have been the dominant tradition.[55] If Payne's statement has in view the entire history of Baptist witness in all of its breadth and depth, it may be regarded as roughly accurate. However, as soon as specific periods and eras are examined, the evidence demands that this statement be seriously qualified.

The late Michael J. Walker has shown, for instance, that when it comes to nineteenth century English Baptist history, "Zwinglianism emerges as the chief contender for a blanket description of Baptist attitudes to the Lord's Supper."[56] The Swiss Reformer Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531) regarded the bread and the wine as mainly signs of what God has accomplished through the death of Christ and the Supper therefore as chiefly a memorial. In recent discussions of Zwingli's perspective on the Lord's Supper it is often maintained that Zwingli was not really a Zwinglian, that is, he saw more in the Lord's Supper than simply a memorial.[57] Be this as it may, a tradition did take its start from those aspects of his thought that stressed primarily the memorial nature of the Lord's Supper. It was this tradition that would dominate Baptist thinking in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A most striking advocacy of the Zwinglian perspective on the Lord's Supper is found in a tract written by John Sutcliff. Entitled *The Ordinance of the Lord's Supper considered* and drawn up in 1803 as a circular letter for the Baptist churches belonging to the Northamptonshire Association, this text abounds in memorialist language. Sutcliff took for his guiding verse throughout this letter the statement of Christ in Luke 22:19: "This do in remembrance of me." Seen through the lens of this text, the Lord's Supper

> is a standing memorial of Christ. When you see the table spread and are about to partake of the bread and wine, think you hear Christ saying, "Remember me." Remember who he is… Again: Remember what he has done… Once more: Remember where he is, and what he is doing.[58]

The fact that Christ instructed us to remember him, Sutcliff continued, clearly "implies his absence." Moreover, if a friend, who has gone away, left us with a small present prior to his departure and asked us to "keep it as a memorial of his friendship," then, even if the present has "little intrinsic worth, we set a high value on it, for his sake." Gazing upon this present aids in the "recollection of our absent friend." So it is with the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. It is designed "to draw our attention to, and assist our meditations upon an unseen Jesus."[59]

In the first two centuries of Baptist witness, however, there had prevailed quite a different view, namely, that associated with the name of John Calvin (1509-1564). In Calvin's perspective on the nature of the Lord's Supper, the bread and wine are signs and guarantees of a present reality. To the one who eats the bread and drinks the wine with faith there is conveyed what they symbolize, namely Christ. The channel, as it were, through which Christ is conveyed to the believer is none other than the Holy Spirit. The Spirit acts as a kind of link or bridge between believers and the ascended Christ. Christ is received by believers in the Supper, "not because Christ inheres the elements, but because the Holy Spirit binds believers" to him. But without faith, only the bare elements are received.[60] Like Calvin, Baptists up until the time of

Sutcliff regarded the Supper as a vehicle that the Spirit employed as an efficacious means of grace for the believer, and thus they opposed the Zwinglian perspective on the Lord's Supper.[61]

A random sampling of seventeenth and eighteenth century Baptist reflections on the Lord's Supper bears out this point. Consider, for instance, William Mitchel (1662-1705), an indefatigable Baptist evangelist in east Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, who could declare that, in the Lord's Supper, Christ's "Death and Blood is shewed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by the Spirit and Faith, made Partakers of his Body and Blood, with all his Benefits, to their spiritual Nourishment and Growth in Grace."[62] Mitchel explicitly repudiates the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Mass, and avers, in words drawn from the doctrinal standard of the Baptists of this era, the *Second London Confession of Faith* (1677/1689), that the Supper is "only a Memorial of that one Offering up of himself, by himself, upon the Cross, once for all."[63] Mitchel was thus quite happy to talk about the celebration of the Lord's Supper in memorialist terms, but his earlier statement shows that he was unwilling to regard it solely as an act of remembrance. Following Calvin and his Baptist forebears, he asserts that the Lord's Supper is definitely a means of spiritual nourishment and that at the Table believers, by the Spirit, do meet with Christ.

Another Calvinistic perspective on the Supper is found in *Thoughts on the Lord's Supper, Relating to the Nature, Subjects, and right Partaking of this Solemn Ordinance* (1748) by Anne Dutton (1692-1765). A prolific author, Dutton corresponded with many of the leading evangelical figures of the eighteenth century—among others, Philip Doddridge (1702-1751), Howel Harris (1714-1773), George Whitefield (1714-1770), and John Wesley (1703-1791)—encouraging them, giving them advice, and sometimes chiding them. On one occasion Whitefield confessed that "her conversation is as weighty as her letters." And Harris once wrote to her that he was convinced that "our Lord has entrusted you with a Talent of writing for him."[64]

Dutton devotes the first section of her sixty-page treatise on the Lord's Supper to outlining its nature. In this section Dutton argues that the Supper is, among other things, a "communication." "As our Lord is spiritually present in his own ordinance," she writes, "so he therein and thereby doth actually communicate, or give himself, his body broken, and his blood shed, with all the benefits of his death, to the worthy receivers."[65] Here Dutton is affirming that Christ is indeed present at the celebration of his supper and makes it a means of grace for those who partake of it with faith. As she states later on in this treatise: in the Lord's Supper "the King is pleas'd to sit with us, at his Table."[66] In fact, so highly does she prize this means of grace that she can state, with what other Baptists of her era might describe as some exaggeration, that the celebration of the Lord's Supper "admits" believers "into the nearest Approach to his glorious Self, that we can make in an Ordinance-Way on the Earth, on this Side the Presence of his Glory in Heaven."[67]

Eighteenth century Baptist hymnology is also a good guide to Baptist eucharistic piety. Some of the richest texts that display this piety can be found in *Hymns In Commemoration Of the Sufferings Of Our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, Compos'd For the Celebration of his Holy Supper* by Joseph

Stennett I (1663-1713), the pastor of a Seventh-Day Baptist Church that met in Pinners' Hall, London. Stennett can describe the Church's celebration at the Table as a "perpetual memorial" of Christ's death, a death that is to be commemorated.[68] And the bread and wine he calls "proper Symbols" and "Figures."[69] Yet, Stennett can also say of these symbols,

> Thy Flesh is Meat indeed,
> Thy Blood the richest wine;
> How blest are they who often feed
> On this Repast of thine![70]

And he can urge his fellow believers,

> Sing *Hallelujah* to our King,
> Who nobly entertains
> His Friends with Bread of Life, and Wine
> That flow'd from all his Veins.
>
> His Body pierc'd with numerous Wounds,
> Did as a Victim bleed;
> That we might drink his sacred Blood,
> And on his Flesh might feed.[71]

Stennett does make it clear that the feeding involved at the Table is one of faith,[72] but this is realistic language utterly foreign to the later Zwinglian perspective.

Finally, two hymns of Benjamin Beddome can be cited as evidence for what is clearly the most prevalent belief about the nature of the Lord's Supper among eighteenth-century Baptists. Beddome was a prolific hymn-writer and many of his hymns were still in use at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although Beddome wrote only a few hymns that dealt specifically with the subject of the Lord's Supper, they are fairly explicit as to his view of its nature. In one he prays,

> Oh for a glimmering sight
> Of my expiring Lord!
> Sure pledge of what yon worlds of light
> Will to the saints afford.
>
> . . .May I behold him in the wine,
> And see him in the bread.[73]

In another, the invitation is given:

> Come then, my soul, partake,
> The banquet is divine:
> His body is the choicest food,
> His blood the richest wine.
>
> Ye hungry starving poor
> Join in the sweet repast;
> View Jesus in these symbols given,
> And his salvation taste.[74]

Beddome did not hold to a Roman Catholic or Lutheran view of the "real presence." The bread and the wine, he asserted, are "symbols." Nevertheless, he did expect the Lord's Supper to be a place where the "sweet repast" of salvation is savoured and Christ himself seen.

Prayer

Baptist piety and spirituality has also never doubted the centrality of prayer in the Christian life.[75] For example, in a sermon on 1 Cor 14:15 ("I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also") Benjamin Beddome declared,

> [Prayer] is…a constant duty; never out of season, never to be neglected, till faith is turned into vision, and prayer into praise. There is no duty we are more apt to omit, no duty which it is more our interest to perform, no duty which Satan more opposes, or with which God is better pleased. As a man cannot live without breathing, so it is certain that the Christian cannot thrive without praying.[76]

An excellent window on the Baptist at prayer can be found in an unpublished manuscript in the archives of Bristol Baptist College, Bristol. Entitled "Queries and solutions," the manuscript records a pre-

cious friendship, that of Benjamin Francis (1734-1799), an indefatigable Welsh pastor and evangelist whose ministry centered on Horlsey, Gloucestershire, in the south-west Cotswolds, and a fellow Welshman Joshua Thomas (1719-1797), who for forty-three years was the pastor of the Baptist cause in Leominster.[77] The manuscript is actually a transcript, drawn up by Thomas, of letters that passed between him and Francis from 1758 to 1770.[78]

The practice of Francis and Thomas appears to have been for one of them to mail two or three queries periodically to the other. Then, some months later the recipient mailed back his answers, together with fresh questions of his own. These answers were commented on, the new questions answered and both the comments and answers mailed back along with new queries, and so forth. All in all, there are sixty-eight questions and answers in two volumes—fifty-eight in the first volume, the remaining ten in the second volume. On only one occasion during these years from 1758 to 1770 was there a noticeable gap in correspondence. That was in 1765 when Francis lost his wife and his three youngest children.

It is noteworthy that at the beginning of the correspondence the two friends sign their letters simply with their names or initials. However, as time passes, their mutual confidence and intimacy deepens, and they begin to write "yours endearingly" or "yours unfeignedly" and even "yours indefatigably" or "yours inexpressibly." It was in October, 1762, Thomas first signed himself "your cordial Brother Jonathan," and in the following February Francis replied with "your most affectionate David." From this point on this is the way the two friends refer to each other.

The questions and their answers are extremely instructive as to the areas of personal theological interest among mid-eighteenth century Calvinists. For instance, the question is asked, "When may a Minister conclude that he is influenced and assisted by the Spirit of God in studying and ministring [*sic*] the word?"[79] Queries are raised about the eternal state of dead infants,[80] how best to understand the remarks in Revelation 20 about the millennium,[81] and about whether or not inoculation against that dreaded killer of the eighteenth century, smallpox, was right or wrong.[82] Let's look closer at those questions and answers that relate to prayer.

"How often should a Christian pray?" Francis asked his friend on one occasion.[83] To this very vital question posed by Francis, Thomas has an extensive answer. He deals first with what he calls the "ejaculatory kind" of prayer—prayers that arise spontaneously during the course of a day's activities—and then the prayers offered during times set apart specifically for prayer, what a later generation of Evangelicals would call "the quiet time."

In response to Thomas' answer, Francis confesses to his friend,

> I wish all our Brethren of the Tribe of Levi were so free from lukewarmness, on the one hand, and enthusiasm, formality & superstition on the other, as my Jonathan appears to be. I am too barren in all my Prayers, but I think mostly so in Closet prayer (except at some seasons) which tempts me in some measure to prefer a more constant ejaculatory Prayer above a more statedly Closet prayer, tho I am persuaded neither should be neglected. Ejaculatory prayer is generally warm, free, and pure, tho short: but I find Closet prayer to be often cold, stiff or artificiall [*sic*], as it were, and mixt [*sic*] with strange impertinences & wandrings [*sic*] of heart. Lord teach me to pray! O that I could perform the Duty always, as a

> duty and a privilege & not as a Task and a Burden![84]

In another of Francis' comments we find the same honesty and humility: "How languid my faith, my hope, my love! how cold and formal am I in secret Devotions!"[85] These remarks surely stem from deep-seated convictions about the vital importance of prayer.

Francis' frank remarks about his own struggles with prayer also have their root in Francis' belief that because the Lord had led him to seek Christ at a very young age—and, in his words, "overwhelmed me with Joy by a sense of his Love"—he should be more eager to pray out of a sense of gratitude. Instead, he confessed, "A stupid, indolent, sensual or legal Temper sadly clog the Wings of my Prayers."[86] He well knew the "Opposition, or at least Disinclination I find in my wicked Heart too often unto Prayer, as if it were to perform some very painful service."[87]

Thomas sought to encourage Francis by reminding him that

> closet prayer [is like] the smoke on a windy day. When it is very calm the smoke will ascend and resemble an erect pillar, but when windy, as soon as it is out it is scattered to and fro, sometimes 'tis beaten down the chimney again and fills the house. Shall I not thus give over? Satan would have it so, and flesh would have it so, but I should be more earnest in it.[88]

Francis told his friend that he sought to pray to God twice daily, but he confessed that his difficulties with following a discipline of a set time for prayer stemmed from his being away from his home a lot of the time. He also admitted that he had taken up "an unhappy Habit of Sleeping in the Morning much longer" than he should have. And this cut into valuable time for prayer. But he did not try to excuse such failings.[89]

Though much has changed since Francis' day, yet this struggle with sin and poor habits that hinder prayer and devotion remains the same. And yet, there must have been times when Francis knew the joys of experientially fellowship with God in prayer. For instance, answering a question by Thomas—"Wherein doth communion and fellowship with God consist?"—Francis replies in part,

> In a nearness to God that is inexpressible, thro the Mediator, and in the enjoyment of God's favour and perfections, yielding nourishing satisfactions in God, as the souls full, everlasting portion and felicity. This enjoyment overwhelms the soul with wonder, glory, joy and triumph: it enflames it with vehement love to God and ardent wishes after his blisfful [*sic*] presence in the heavenly world.[90]

Yet, as Francis well knew, these foretastes of glory given to the believer in prayer are not a resting place in this world. Christ, not *the believer's* experience of communing with him in prayer, is ever to be the focus of prayer. Thus, Francis could pray—and this text well reveals the Christ-centered nature of historic Baptist spirituality, a topic for another article!—only a year before his death:

> O that every sacrifice I offer were consumed with the fire of ardent love to Jesus. Reading, praying, studying and preaching are to me very cold exercises, if not warmed with the love of Christ. This, this is the quintessence of holiness, of happiness, of heaven. While many professors desire to know that Christ loves them, may it ever be my desire to know that I love him, by feeling his love mortifying in me the love of self, animating my whole soul to serve him, and, if called by his providence, to suffer even death for his sake.[91]

Conclusion

Central to the study of and reflection on the history of the church is the fact that earlier generations of believers did things differently than we in the present do. This does not automatically make them right and us wrong—which is the mistake of exalting tradition to the level of Scripture. Nor should it be a matter of no import for us—the mistake of making present-day thought *the* plumb-line of all our thinking and doing. But such study and reflection should help us to gauge what we consider to be orthopraxy.

Our Baptist forebears whom we have considered in this essay sought to be, in all things, men and women of the Word, as we hopefully do. As such, their interpretation of that Word in thought and deed is truly worthy of consideration. Pondering their lives and thinking should awaken us to the vital realization that we are not the first to whom God's Holy Word has spoken. And if we find a difference between their thinking and ours may it drive us back to that Word, as the Apostle's teaching did to the noble Bereans of old (Acts 17:11).

ENDNOTES

[1]Cited in Simon K. H. Chan, "The Puritan Meditative Tradition, 1599-1691: A Study of Ascetical Piety" (Unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Magdalene College, Cambridge University, 1986), 11. I am indebted to Randall Pederson of Grand Rapids for access to this thesis.

[2]Cited in Chan, "Puritan Meditative Tradition," 11. Dewey D. Wallace, Jr. (*The Spirituality of the Later English Puritans: An Anthology* [Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1987], xxv) has noted that the "major themes of late Puritan spirituality were expressed and cultivated in many ways. Important among these means for stimulation of the spiritual life were reading, attendance at sermons, conferring with the spiritually mature, partaking of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, prayer, and meditation."

[3]John Sutcliff, *Jealousy for the Lord of Hosts illustrated* (London: W. Button, 1791), 12. See also his *The Authority and Sanctification of the Lord's-Day, Explained and Enforced* (Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association, 1786), 8: "Be earnest with God for the gift of his Holy Spirit, in an abundant measure. Seek his divine influences, to furnish you with *spiritual* ability, in order that you may be found in the discharge of that which is your indispensible [*sic*] duty. Highly prize his sacred operations. These are the real excellency of all religious duties."

[4]*Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture-Metaphors* (3 vols.; trans. and ed. Thomas De Laune; London: Enoch Prosser, 1681), 2:312, 314.

[5]Benjamin Beddome, *Communion with God our Security and Bliss*, in *Sermons printed from the manuscripts of the late Rev. Benjamin Beddome, A.M.* (London: William Ball, 1835), 399-401.

[6]Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), 66.

[7]*Heart Bleedings for Professor Abominations*, in *Confessions of Faith, and Other Public Documents, Illustrative of the History of the Baptist Churches of England in the seventeenth Century* (ed. Edward Bean Underhill; London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1854), 304.

[8]Cited by Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (4 vols., London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1823), 3:300.

[9] S. L. Copson, *Association Life of the Particu-*

lar Baptists of Northern England 1699-1732 (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1991), 89, 95 (italics added).

[10]Christopher J. Ellis, *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 134. See also Ellis' whole chapter on the role of preaching in Baptist worship (124-49).

[11]D. Mervyn Himbury, *British Baptists. A Short History* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1962), 141.

[12]One critic of the Baptists and their fellow Dissenters in the early nineteenth century could actually describe their faith as "the religion of barns"! See John Greene, *Reminiscences of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.* (London: Frederick Westley/A. H. Davis, 1834), 25.

[13]Helpful in this discussion of early Baptist architecture has been John Davison, "The Architecture of the Local Church" in *Local Church Practice* (Haywards Heath, Sussex: Carey Publications, 1978), 179-90.

[14]Hercules Collins, *The Temple Repair'd* (London: William and Joseph Marshal, 1702), 22. Also see the extract from this work in H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1990), 111-15.

[15]Ibid., 19.

[16]Ibid., 24.

[17]Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (4 vols.; London: Isaac Taylor Hinton, 1830), 4:462.

[18]Collins, *Temple Repair'd*, 25-26.

[19]Ibid., 28. The remark about "painted Glass in a Window, that makes a great show, but darkens the Light" says much about Baptist thoughts about the ornamentation found in many Anglican churches.

[20]Andrew Fuller, *Thoughts on Preaching*, in The *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (2 vols.; rev. Joseph Belcher; 3rd London ed.; repr., Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 1:717.

[21]Cited in R. W. Dixon, *A Century of Village Nonconformity at Bluntisham, Hunts. 1787 to 1887* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1887), 195.

[22]Benjamin Beddome, "Sermon V," in *Short Discourses adapted to Village Worship, or The Devotions of the Family* (8 vols.; London: Burton, Smith and Co., 1820), 8:49-50.

[23]Benjamin Beddome, "The Heavenly Calling" in *Sermons printed from the manuscripts of the late Rev. Benjamin Beddome*, 111, 116. The final sentence of this quotation is taken directly from the Puritan author Thomas Watson (d. *c.*1686). See his *A Body of Divinity* (1890; repr., London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 221.

[24]Robert Hall, Jr., *On Hearing the Word*, in *The Works of the Rev. Robert Hall, A. M.* (4 vol.; ed. Olinthus Gregory and Joseph Belcher; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1852), 1:249, 250.

[25]Ibid., 1:250-51.

[26]Ibid., 1:255-56.

[27]In London there were two specially constructed buildings that served during this era as baptisteries for the numerous Baptist congregations in the capital. According to one account, they were "splendid structures, with handsome marble fronts, elaborate suites of rooms, and well equipped" (John Stanley, *The Church in the Hop Garden. A Chatty Account of the Longworth-Coate Baptist Meeting: Berks and Oxfordshire [Ante 1481-1935] and its Ministers* [London: The Kingsgate Press, 1935], 138-139).

[28]"The Harvest of 100 Years. Ebenezer Baptist Chapel 1877-1977" (Typescript, 1977), 1. I am indebted to Mr. Chris Curry, formerly of St. Catherine's, Ontario, for this reference. For a more well-known account of a public baptism, see that recorded by Robert Robinson, *The History of Baptism* (London: Thomas Knott, 1790), 541-43. Detailed accounts of outdoor baptisms like this one by Robinson are rare. See also Roger Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage* (London: The Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1990), 98-99.

[29]Fuller, *The Practical Uses of Christian Baptism*, in *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 3:343.

[30]James Butterworth, *Repentance and Baptism considered* (Coventry, 1774), 36. I owe this reference to Olin C. Robison, "The Particular Baptists in England 1760-1820" (Unpublished D. Phil. Thesis, Regent's Park College, Oxford University, 1963), 287.

[31]John Ryland, *The Work of Faith, the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope, illustrated; in the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (2nd ed.; London: Button & Son, 1818), 22.

[32]Robison, "Particular Baptists in England", 288. On Jenkins, see R. Philip Roberts, *Continuity and Change: London Calvinistic Baptists and The Evangelical Revival 1760-1820* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1989), 115-16.

[33]William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (rev. ed.; Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 154-55. Typical of those who attacked the

Baptists in this regard was Daniel Featley (1582-1645), an influential, outspoken minister devoted to the Church of England and critical of Puritanism. Featley penned a scurrilous attack on the Baptists entitled *The Dippers dipt. Or, The Anabaptists duck'd and plunged Over Head and Eares* (1645). In it he maintained that the Baptists were in the habit of stripping "stark naked, not onely [*sic*] when they flocke [*sic*] in great multitudes, men and women together, to their Jordans to be dipt; but also upon other occasions, when the season permits"! (cited in Gordon Kingsley, "Opposition to Early Baptists (1638-1645)," *Baptist History and Heritage* 4, no.1 [January, 1969]: 29).

For this charge of sexual immorality, see also J. F. McGregor, "The Baptists: Fount of All Heresy" in his and B. Reay, eds., *Radical Religion in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 41-42; James Barry Vaughn, "Public Worship and Practical Theology in the Work of Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)" (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of St. Andrews, 1989), 60.

[34]J. M. Ross, "The Theology of Baptism in Baptist History," *The Baptist Quarterly* 15 (1953-1954): 100.

[35]Fuller, *The Practical Uses of Christian Baptism*, 3:339.

[36]Cited in Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians* (New York: Cambridge University, 1961), 505. For a brief statement by Fuller himself about his upbringing and lack of formal education, see his "Discipline of the English and Scottish Baptist Churches," in *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 3:481). For the life of Fuller, the classic study is that of John Ryland (see note 31 above).

For more recent studies, see Phil Roberts, "Andrew Fuller," in *Baptist Theologians* (ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery; Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 121-39, and Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth-Century Particular Baptist Life* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K./Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2003).

On his thought, see also Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *'At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word': Andrew Fuller as an Apologist* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K./Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2004).

[37]Benjamin Davies, "Ministerial Education," *The Canada Baptist Magazine* 3, no. 9 (March, 1840), 194-95.

[38]David Philips, *Memoir of the Life, Labors, and Extensive Usefulness of the Rev. Christmas Evans* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1843), 74.

[39]Fuller, *The Practical Uses of Christian Baptism*, 3:339-40.

[40]Andrew Fuller, "Thoughts on Open Communion," in *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 3:504-05. See also 3:512.

[41]Fuller, *The Practical Uses of Christian Baptism*, 3:340.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Ibid., 3:341.

[44]John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament* (3 vols.; 1809; repr., Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), 1:495. On Gill's theology of baptism, see Stanley K. Fowler, "John Gill's Doctrine of Believer Baptism," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771). A Tercentennial Appreciation* (ed. Michael A. G. Haykin; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 69-91.

[45]Fuller, *The Practical Uses of Christian Baptism*, 3:341.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Ibid., 3:342.

[48]Ibid., 3:342-43.

[49]Helen M. Leach, "Kitchen Garden," in *The Oxford Companion to Gardens* (ed. Geoffrey Jellicoe, et al.; Oxford/New York: Oxford University, 1986), 314-15; Geoffrey Jellicoe, "Walled Garden" in ibid., 592-93; David C. Stuart, *Georgian Gardens* (London: Robert Hale, 1979), 142-43.

[50]Benjamin Keach, *Gospel Mysteries Unveiled* (4 vols.; repr., London: L. I. Higham, 1815), 2:332, 339. See also his *The Glory of a True Church, and its Discipline display'd* (London, 1697), 50-51.

[51]Dafydd Densil James Morgan, "The Development of the Baptist Movement in Wales between 1714 and 1815 with particular reference to the Evangelical Revival" (Unpublished D. Phil. Thesis, Regent's Park College, University of Oxford, 1986), 39-40.

[52]Andrew Fuller, "Evil Things which Pass under Specious Names," in *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 3:800.

[53]Fuller, *The Practical Uses of Christian Baptism*, 3:343.

[54]Ibid., 3:344-45.

[55]Ernest A. Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers. Baptist Thought and Practice Yesterday and Today* (2nd ed.; London: Carey Kingsgate, 1952), 61.

[56]Michael J. Walker, *Baptists at the Table. The Theology of the Lord's Sup-*

per amongst English Baptists in the Nineteenth Century (Didcot, Oxfordshire: Baptist Historical Society, 1992), 3.

[57]See Derek R. Moore-Crispin, "'The Real Absence': Ulrich Zwingli's View of the Lord's Supper," in *Union and Communion, 1529-1979* (London: The Westminster Conference, 1979), 22-34.

[58]John Sutcliff, *The Ordinance of the Lord's Supper considered* (Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association; Dunstable, 1803), 2, 3.

[59]Ibid., 3-4.

[60]Victor A. Shepherd, *The Nature and Function of Faith in the Theology of John Calvin* (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1983), 220. Other helpful studies on Calvin's theology of the Lord's Supper include B. A. Gerrish, "The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Confessions," *Theology Today* 13 (1966-1967): 224-43; John D. Nicholls, "'Union with Christ': John Calvin on the Lord's Supper," in *Union and Communion*, 35-54; John Yates, "Role of the Holy Spirit in the Lord's Supper," *Churchman* 105 (1991): 355-356; B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

[61]For a good overview of the high regard in which the Lord's Supper was viewed by late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Dissenters, see Margaret Spufford, "The Importance of the Lord's Supper to Dissenters," in *The World of Rural Dissenters, 1520-1725* (ed. Margaret Spufford; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 86-102; and Karen Smith, "The Covenant Life of Some Eighteenth-Century Calvinistic Baptists in Hampshire and Wiltshire," in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B.R. White* (ed. William H. Brackney and Paul S. Fiddes with John H.Y. Briggs; Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1999), 178-82. Ellis (*Gathering*, 176-199, *passim*) is also helpful in this regard.

[62]"William Mitchill's 'Jachin & Boaz'–1707," *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* 3 (1912-1913): 161.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Cited in Stephen J. Stein, "A Note on Anne Dutton, Eighteenth-Century Evangelical," *Church History* 44 (1975): 488, 489. Stein's article is an excellent, concise study of Dutton. See also Anne Dutton, *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton. Eighteenth-Century, British-Baptist, Woman Theologian* (4 vols.; comp. JoAnn Ford Watson; Macon, GA: Mercer University, 2003-2006), Vol. 1, *Letters*, and Vol. 2, *Discourses, Poetry, Hymns, Memoir.*

For two other, earlier studies which fail to do her justice, see J. C. Whitebrook, "The Life and Works of Mrs. Ann Dutton", *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, 7 (1921): 129-46; H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Life and Faith of the Baptists* (London: The Kingsgate Press, 1946), 50-56.

[65]Anne Dutton, *Thoughts on the Lord's Supper, Relating to the Nature, Subjects, and right Partaking of this Solemn Ordinance* (London, 1748), 3-4.

[66]Ibid., 21.

[67]Ibid., 25.

[68]Joseph Stennett I, *Hymns In Commemoration Of the Sufferings Of Our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, Compos'd For the Celebration of his Holy Supper* (London: N. Cliff and D. Jackson, 1713), iii, 4.

[69]Ibid., 29, 20.

[70]Ibid., 35.

[71]Ibid., 23.

[72]Thus, in one of his hymns Stennett can state (Ibid., 19):

> Here may our Faith still on Thee feed
> The only Food Divine;
> To Faith thy Flesh is Meat indeed,
> Thy Blood the Noblest wine.

[73]Benjamin Beddome, *Hymns adapted to Public Worship, or Family Devotion* (London, 1818), Hymn no. 672.

[74]Ibid., Hymn no. 669.

[75]See the helpful overview by Ellis, *Gathering*, 103-124.

[76]Benjamin Beddome, *The Nature and Importance of Prayer*, in *Sermons printed from the manuscripts of the late Rev. Benjamin Beddome*, 366.

[77]For the life and ministry of Francis, see Thomas Flint, "A Brief Narrative of the Life and Death of the Rev. Benjamin Francis, A.M.," annexed to John Ryland, Jr., *The Presence of Christ the Source of eternal Bliss. A Funeral Discourse,… occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Benjamin Francis, A. M.* (Bristol, 1800), 33-76; Geoffrey F. Nuttall, "Letters by Benjamin Francis," *Trafodion* (1983): 4-8; Michael A. G. Haykin, "Benjamin Francis (1734-1799)," in *The British Particular Baptists, 1638-1910* (2 vols.; ed. Michael A. G. Haykin; Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2000), 2:16-29.

For Joshua Thomas, see Eric W. Hayden, *Joshua Thomas: A Biography*, in *The American Baptist Heritage in*

Wales (ed. Carroll C. and Willard A. Ramsey; Lafayette, Tennessee: Church History Research and Archives Affiliation, 1976), part two.

[78]"Queries and solutions" (MS G.98.5; Bristol Baptist College Library, Bristol, England). For permission to quote from this manuscript I am indebted to the National Library of Wales. On this correspondence, see Geoffrey F. Nuttall, "Questions and Answers: An Eighteenth-Century Correspondence," *The Baptist Quarterly* 27 (1977-1978): 83-90.

[79]"Queries and solutions," vol. 1, Query 5.

[80]Ibid., Queries 17 and 22.

[81]Ibid., Query 18

[82]Ibid., Query 45.

[83]Ibid., Query 44.

[84]Ibid., Remarks on [Thomas'] answer to Query 43, 44.

[85]Ibid., Remarks on [Thomas'] answer to Query 48.

[86]Ibid., vol. 2, Remarks on Queries 7-8.

[87]Ibid., Remarks on Queries 7-8.

[88]Cited Eric W. Hayden, "Eighteenth-Century Pulpit Preparation [2]," *The Banner of Truth* 104 (May 1972): 17.

[89]"Queries and solutions," vol. 2, Remarks on Queries 7-8.

[90]Ibid., vol. 1, Query 55.

[91]Benjamin Francis, Letter to a friend, November 6, 1798 (Flint, "Brief Narrative of the Life and Death of the Rev. Benjamin Francis, A.M.," 58-59).

What's New with the New Age? Why Christians Need to Remain on Guard against the Threat of New Age Spirituality

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Introduction

New Age spirituality is fast-food religion perfectly suited for a postmodern culture like ours. It offers a quick-and-easy feeling of satisfaction with almost no real nourishment for the soul, while it contains additives and artificial ingredients that are actually harmful to true spiritual health. But you can still have it *your* way. There are no dogmas, few demands, no sense of self-denial, and little need for faith. This is a kind of *anti*-religion: a spiritually oriented worldview for people with an intuitive sense of the sacred, but who are wary of organized religion.

As a matter of fact, the so-called *New Age movement* is nothing like any organized religion. It has no headquarters, no central hierarchy, no holy book, no recognized clergy, no common set of doctrines, and no confessional standards. It is not, technically, a religious cult or even a formal "movement" (which implies structure and membership and mission).

And yet the most outstanding features of the New Age phenomenon seem very much like distinctives that properly belong to a cult or a movement. "New Age" is, after all, mainly an approach to *spirituality*—a way of viewing and interacting with the spiritual realm. It has spawned an enormous publishing and retail industry, major conventions, countless seminars and programs, and a very large community of people who identify with one another and share common ideas and concerns. In fact, those publishers and those conferences serve as the backbone for a vast but informal network of many small sects, cottage industries, and social groups all populated by individuals who practice various forms of spiritual self-exploration and who are absolutely convinced that we are living at the dawn of a New Age.

In that sense it is fitting to speak of the New Age phenomenon as a "movement"—and a *religious* movement at that. The clergy of the New Age are usually called *practitioners* rather than priests or pastors. Their influence varies, as does the content of their teaching, because one of the distinctives of New Age spirituality is that it recognizes no authority higher than one's own personal experience. This is indeed a kind of religion, but it is a classic expression of the postmodern preference for religion as experience, not dogma.

Of course, the New Age phenomenon is much *more* than a religion. It is also a social and cultural current that has endured for two or three decades and has had profound effects on western lifestyles. The New Age movement has engendered such

diverse trends as holistic medicine, natural diets, and a unique style of instrumental and electronic music. The widespread fascination with crop circles, UFOs, earth's mysteries, crystals, alchemy, and ancient forms of superstition; the popularity of astrology, pseudo-science, and environmentalism; and the burgeoning interest in Native American culture are all common side effects of New Age spirituality. These things and others like them have become badges of New Age identity.

Because of the diversity of belief among New Age enthusiasts and the amorphous nature of the New Age network, a formal, succinct definition of the New Age movement is practically impossible. But it will nevertheless be helpful to begin with a simple thumbnail description of the New Age phenomenon. We will then look more closely at some of the major elements of this simple description in order to consider why the New Age movement ought to be a matter of concern for biblical Christians.

The New Age movement is a diverse and eclectic approach to spirituality that stresses individual self-exploration through a variety of beliefs and practices borrowed from a wide array of extrabiblical sources and non-Christian belief systems, ranging from astrology to eastern mysticism to science fiction, and beyond. Notice the key characteristics: New Age spirituality is wildly eclectic and therefore radically syncretistic; it is individualistic and therefore ultimately man-centered; and it is almost purely subjective and therefore devoid of any sense of absolute authority. As such, it is inherently hostile to virtually every distinctive element of a biblical worldview.

The Background of the New Age

The expression "New Age" refers to a belief that earth's history is currently in a major transition pertaining to the signs of the zodiac. As a matter of fact, the position of the earth relative to the constellations does actually shift slightly over time, owing to a kind of slow wobble in the earth's axis. This phenomenon is known to astronomers as "the precession of the equinoxes," in which the position of sunset at the vernal equinox gradually moves in a westward circle, at a rate that would make a full rotation approximately every 25,800 years. As the shift occurs, the backdrop of the sun at sunset moves almost imperceptibly from one constellation to another, in rhythmic transitions that occur roughly every 2,000 years.

One such transition occurred around 4,000 B.C., as the location of sunset at equinox moved out of Gemini and into Taurus, the bull. Then around 2,000 B.C., Taurus gave way to Aries, the ram. About 2,000 years later, the backdrop of the equinox moved out of Aries and into Pisces, the fish. And a similar transition is currently underway as the precession of the equinoxes moves the sunset-point from Pisces to Aquarius.

New Agers generally believe that this movement through the constellations marks the ages of human history and religious belief. During the age of Taurus, the bull (which lasted from antediluvian times until the era of Moses), calf worship was popular. The shift to the age of Aries, the ram, supposedly accounts for the rise of Judaism, with its stress on the ritual sacrifice of rams and sheep. And the dawn of Pisces, the fish, corresponds to the start of the Christian era. That is supposed to explain why the fish has always been one of the church's favorite symbols and remains so today. In the words of one New Age writer, "Our theology is not played out so much in books and literal earthly

dramas, but rather in the heavens as the Sun makes it's [*sic*] passage through the signs of the Zodiac."[1]

So the most basic of all New Age ideas is rooted in astrology—specifically, a belief that human history is now at the dawn of a whole new era: the Age of Aquarius. That, of course, was the message of the opening song of the 1967 Broadway musical, *Hair,* a song that became, in effect, the anthem of the New Age and first introduced millions to the concept.

New Age spirituality is a postmodern phenomenon with gnostic, pagan, and metaphysical roots. It is impossible in such a short article to trace all the spiritual tributaries to such a diverse movement, but it should be noted that the New Age is a direct successor to some of the metaphysical cults that became popular in the nineteenth century, including New Thought, Swedenborgianism, Theosophy, Science of Mind, and even Christian Science. New Age practitioners liberally borrow language and ideas from all those sects, freely adapting and reshaping them according to personal preference.

Jungian philosophy is another major factor in the popularization of New Age spirituality. Jung, of course, coined the concepts of "the collective unconscious," "the god within," and mind-expansion techniques. Wouter Hanegraaff wrote that Jung "sacralized psychology, by filling it with the contents of esoteric speculation. The result was a body of theories that enabled people to talk about God while really meaning their own psyche, and about their own psyche while really meaning the divine. If the psyche is 'mind,' and God is 'mind' as well, then to discuss one must mean to discuss the other."[2]

Wouter Hanegraaff's reference to "esoteric speculation" hints at another major stream of New Age influence: Gnosticism. The fundamental idea that unites all gnostic and New Age thought is a belief that the key to real understanding lies in some mysterious, ancient body of hidden knowledge available only to enlightened minds. Normally, the way to gain enlightenment is by being initiated into whatever group claims to be the guardians of the secret knowledge.

Add a distinctly postmodern brand of subjectivity to this eclectic blend of astrological, metaphysical, psychological, and gnostic influences, and you can begin to get a sense of the milieu in which New Age spirituality has flourished. It would probably be fair to characterize the rise of the New Age movement as the spiritual side of the postmodern paradigm shift.[3]

Typical Beliefs and Practices of New Age Spirituality

New Age thinking is so diverse, so fluid, and so unique to each individual practitioner that it is probably not possible to make any general statement about the religion of the New Age that could not be challenged by someone pointing out significant exceptions to the rule. Nevertheless, a few common features dominate so much of New Age spirituality that they need to be highlighted as key characteristics of the mainstream of the movement.

Pantheism, for example, is the common belief of many, but not all, in the New Age movement. This is the view that God is everything and everything is God. (God is immanent in this view, but not transcendent.) Thus the universe itself—all of nature—constitutes the true God, so that there is no valid distinction between the Creator and creation.

Other New Agers would hold instead to *panentheism,* the belief that God is *in*

everything and everything is *in* God. The difference here is that panentheists retain some notion of a kind of divine transcendence, so that God is thought to be Someone or (more likely) something—an impersonal force—bigger than the universe.

Either way, the New Age concept of deity is rooted in *monism,* not biblical monotheism. Scripture teaches that God is distinct from his creation, and the New Testament reveals Him as a Trinity—three distinct divine Persons yet one in substance. He is immanent—he pervades and sustains the universe. But He is also *truly* transcendent—separate from, not part of, and not subject to the limitations of, the material universe.

Monism, by contrast, claims that God and the universe are all of one essence (or one substance, or energy, or principle). In effect, monism eliminates not only the essential distinction between Creator and creation, but also every significant difference between one kind of being and another. The individual and the universe are ultimately the same. All beings, God included, are ultimately one with the universe itself.

This belief in monism is one of the key differences between New Age spirituality and classic Gnosticism. Gnostics were predominantly dualists, believing that everything in the universe is reducible to two fundamental, opposite realities: mind and matter, good and evil, spirit and flesh, yin and yang, or whatever. New Age spirituality is a kind of neo-Gnosticism, combining the esotericism of early Gnosticism, together with handpicked beliefs and superstitions borrowed from ancient gnostic sources, but blending those with a fundamental commitment to monism.

That's why in New Age spirituality the stress is on harmony, global unity, and the oneness of all things. If everything that has ever been or ever will be all flows from a single energy source, everything is ultimately capable of being harmonized.

Accordingly, New Age thought has little room for the concepts of evil, sin, and redemption. Those have given way to the therapeutic language of addiction and recovery, positive energy, holistic health, and the notion of love as a tolerant and always-affirming state of mind (rather than the more biblical concept of love as the giving of oneself for another).

Holism is the New Age movement's preferred term for expressing the spiritual aspect of monism. Holism, in popular terminology, is the view that the whole of any complex system is greater than the sum of its parts. The person with a holistic perspective is convinced that the best way to understand anything is always by seeing it as a whole, never by breaking it down and examining the parts. New Agers apply that theory to the entire universe, which, by their monistic way of thinking, *is* God. The goal of New Age spirituality, then, is to become one (or rather to appreciate one's true oneness) with the universe and thereby be in harmony with God.

Such harmony, in turn, supposedly unleashes the divine energy in the New Ager's own experience. Empowerment such as this is the goal and the object of New Age spirituality. In the words of one practitioner: "New Age Spirituality is all about getting your power back. Not that you ever lost it. Sometimes you gave your power away, misplaced it, or forgot you had power in the first place."[4]

The means of this empowerment are as diverse as the history of human superstition. Various New Age practitioners have

borrowed freely from practically every occult and mystical source ranging from ancient religions such as Zoroastrianism to modern science fiction.[5] Tools of the trade for New Age practitioners include synthesized music, health food, holistic medicine, incense, aromatherapy, candles, and crystals. (Crystals are supposed to help achieve harmony with the universe because of the way they vibrate at a constant frequency).

Other common features of New Age spirituality include even darker occult practices, such as tarot cards, divination, the use of magical potions and incantations, numerology, graphology, and, of course, astrology. New Age practitioners often function as mediums, channeling "spirit guides" who claim to be angels. (The ubiquitous angel-themed greeting-card and gift-shop paraphernalia are prompted mainly by the New Age movement's superstitious obsession with angels and other spirit beings, rather than by any widespread interest in biblical teaching about angelic activity.) Many believers in the New Age have delved into wicca (a modern form of witchcraft), spiritism, shamanism, Sufism, yoga, Druidism, and various other forms of neopaganism. New Agers have also borrowed, adapted, and popularized several familiar doctrines from Hindu and Buddhist sources, including belief in reincarnation, karma, the chakra, and Nirvana. These ideas are all often blended with quasi-Christian and gnostic terminology so that the language of New Age spirituality can at times have a biblical ring to it. (Celtic Christianity is also a favorite source for some New Agers.)

But of course New Age spirituality is not biblical. At its core, it is anti-Christian. It moves freely in and out among various occult, gnostic, and pagan themes. It seems to favor fringe religious ideas and "alternative" beliefs, which are lavishly borrowed, modified, and adapted from these sources. It replaces the doctrine of Christ's deity with belief in the divinity of nature itself—and finally teaches the divinity of every individual. It eliminates the significance of good and evil and thereby obviates the entire concept of redemption. And it is wholly reliant on a blend of practices and beliefs borrowed from an almost boundless array of extra-biblical, occult, and pagan sources.

New Age spirituality is therefore at odds with every classic division of Christian doctrine. With regard to *hamartiology*, New Age selfism all but does away with the biblical concept of sin. New Age *anthropology* starts with a denial that humanity is in any way uniquely above the rest of nature. As far as *Christology* is concerned, New Age beliefs utterly eliminate the uniqueness of Christ.

And when it comes to *soteriology,* New Age beliefs overthrow the gospel itself with a completely different message. Of course, the heart and soul of biblical soteriology is the doctrine of the atonement. The forgiveness of sins, the imputation of righteousness to the repentant sinner, and a host of truths regarding justification by faith all flow from that.

By contrast, the centerpiece of New Age spirituality is individual self-fulfillment and empowerment. It is actually a kind of anti-soteriology. As a matter of fact, it is the very quintessence of every kind of works-religion, because if New Age spirituality is correct, *I'm* the one I have to please. *I'm* the only one who can chart my own spiritual journey. *I'm* the one whose standards I have to live up to. And *I'm* the one I ultimately have to turn

to for help.

The inevitable result is the systematic deification of self. And the quest for individual self-deification is the very essence of the single most destructive religious lie of all time. As numerous Christian critics of New Age spirituality have already pointed out, the whole New Age belief system flows from the same falsehood the serpent enticed Eve with in the garden: "You will be like God" (Gen 3:5).

The Rise and Decline of New Ageism

The New Age movement began to ferment in pop culture in the 1970s, an offshoot of 1960s counterculture. As we have noted, it was introduced to millions at the end of the 60s by means of a popular song heralding the dawning of the age of Aquarius. Belief in the New Age grew quickly and somewhat quietly in the 1970s to become a major force by the end of the decade.

The movement first seemed to catch the attention of the major mass media in America when actress Shirley MacLaine stepped forward at the end of 1983 to become its best-known and most colorful proponent with the release of her book *Out on a Limb*.[6] The book (dramatized in a 1987 television miniseries starring the actress herself) chronicled Ms. MacLaine's quest for New Age enlightenment and self-discovery, as she dabbled in the occult arts, had an out-of-body experience, attempted communication with spiritual and extraterrestrial beings, and explored various new-age fads such as crystals and channeling. She described how in one of these channeling experiments a being who identified himself as "John," who said he had lived on earth in the time of Christ, told her through a medium, "*You* are God. *You* know you are divine."[7] MacLaine believed the message. In a book two years later, delving even more deeply into her New Age interests, she wrote, "I am God, because all energy is plugged in to the same source. We are each aspects of that source. We are all part of God. We are individualized reflections of the God source. God is us and we are God."[8] "I am God in Light" was the mantra she said she chanted during her yoga exercises.[9]

MacLaine may have done more than any other single celebrity in the 1980s to popularize the New Age movement, but her eccentricities and her apparent willingness to believe almost any superstition also helped spark something of a popular backlash against the culture of the New Age. The expression *New Age* when used in popular media and entertainment began to take on negative connotations of gullibility and shallowness. The trendiness of New Age culture became the brunt of derisive comedy sketches and the luster faded from the movement.

Meanwhile, a steady stream of books from both evangelical and secular critics attacked New Age ideas as unbiblical, unsound, dangerous, and sometimes just plain ridiculous. Constance Cumbey's *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow: The New Age Movement and Our Coming Age of Barbarism*[10] was one of the first books to critique the New Age movement from an evangelical perspective. Cumbey (an attorney and an evangelical Baptist) portrayed the New Age movement as a vast and well-organized conspiracy—ultimately a plot to bring the Antichrist to power. Her sensational claims appealed to many, and a few writers, including Dave Hunt,[11] echoed Cumbey's conspiracy theory.

Several more sober Christian apologists who took on the New Age movement were

highly critical of Cumbey's conspiracy theory. These included Douglas Groothuis of Denver Seminary[12] and Elliot Miller of the Christian Research Institute.[13] These authors pointed out that there is scant credible evidence of any highly organized, centrally-coordinated plot for the New Age movement as an organized entity to take over governments or destroy established religious structures. Christians should oppose New-Age *ideologies,* but they need to do it on spiritual and biblical grounds. Because the conspiracy-theory mentality itself demands such a high level of blind credulity, it may in fact be a hindrance to effective apologetics work, they pointed out.

Influential secular books analyzing the New Age movement included Marilyn Ferguson's *The Aquarian Conspiracy.*[14] Despite the impression given by the title, this book is nothing like Cumbey's treatment. Ferguson was wholly sympathetic to most of the ideals of the New Age, and the kind of "conspiracy" she described was open and more or less coincidental, rather than the sort of clandestine and dark scheme Cumbey envisioned. *The Aquarian Conspiracy* was nonetheless one of the first popular volumes to reveal the widespread influence of New Age ideas, and its title may have inadvertently raised some alarms about the aims and intentions of the burgeoning movement.

Another important (and more recent) book on the subject from a non-evangelical perspective is *The New Age Movement: Religion, Culture and Society in the Age of Post Modernity,* by Paul Heelas.[15] Heelas gives a careful and dispassionate history of the growth and development of New Age spirituality in a critical but academic context. A still more recent scholarly book worth mentioning from a non-evangelical perspective is Steve Sutcliffe's *Children of the New Age,*[16] in which New Age spirituality and terminology are subjected to thorough deconstruction in vigorous postmodern fashion.

Evangelical publishers, who in the late 1980s and early 1990s were producing critiques of the New Age movement at a rate faster than most people could possibly read, have turned for the most part to different genres of books. In the wake of the astonishing success of a few mega-bestsellers like *The Prayer of Jabez*, *Wild at Heart,* and *The Purpose-Driven Life,* Christian publishing has seemed to favor books that are non-polemical. Furthermore, with the Emerging Church movement lately becoming the focus of so much dialogue and debate within the evangelical movement, the New Age movement seems to have all but faded from the agenda.

Is The New Age Just Old News?

Some Evangelicals might be tempted to think interest in New Age spirituality is waning—that the movement itself is on the decline. But that would be a mistake. According to data published by George Barna, people holding New Age beliefs already outnumbered evangelical Christians a decade ago. Survey data released in 1996 showed that 20 percent of American adults followed New Age teachings. About half that number could be classified (even in the broadest possible terms) as biblical Christians.[17]

ReligiousTolerance.org, an Ontario-based nonsectarian website that collects and publishes survey data regarding religious trends of all kinds, says that today, "Interest in new religious movements (e.g., New Age, Neopaganism) is growing rapidly. In particular, Wiccans are doubling in numbers about every 30

months."[18]

The New Age movement is by no means a dying influence. If anything, many New Age beliefs have simply become so mainstream that they no longer seem as unconventional or as spiritually menacing as they once did. Both the language and the ideology of the New Age have gradually become so familiar in the culture of American religion that evangelicals simply do not pay much attention to the New Age anymore. The whole subject has the feel of yesterday's news.

Meanwhile, the Emerging Church movement and other postmodern streams of influence within the evangelical movement are challenging historic evangelical convictions with the same kind of epistemic deconstruction that gave rise to the New Age movement in the first place. The Emerging Church movement has raised the serious question of whether certainty of any kind is warranted by Christian belief. The authority of Scripture, the importance of doctrinal clarity, the exclusivity of Christ, the reality of divine wrath against sin, and the objectivity of revealed truth have all recently come under fire within evangelicalism in the context of "the Emerging Conversation."

Few would deny that the evangelical movement itself has grown increasingly superficial and pragmatic while moving away from its historic doctrinal moorings. Evangelical churches today are often more concerned about their philosophies of ministry than about their statements of faith.[19] Unfortunately, evangelicals too often follow the trends of secular society rather than confronting the culture.

As a result, the contemporary evangelical movement has become more susceptible to mysticism, relativism, and subjectivity. Evangelicals are more likely than ever to regard intuition as divine guidance, and less certain than ever that Scripture is authoritative and objectively true. As these trends, together with streams of feminist and postmodern influences, gain more and more momentum in evangelical circles, the evangelical drift actually seems headed in exactly the same direction as the New Age movement.

George Barna noted in 1996 that as American religion becomes more diverse and syncretic, many people are seeking "a new perception of religion: a personalized, customized form of faith views which meet personal needs, minimize rules and absolutes, and bear little resemblance to the 'pure' form of any of the world's major religions."[20] That very thing now appears to be happening at an accelerating pace *within* evangelicalism. Evangelicals have shown a willingness to embrace and absorb almost any trend from popular culture, while casting off their historic distinctives. The evangelical movement appears to be abandoning every safeguard against the tide of New Age influences.

In a 1992 symposium titled *New Age Spirituality: An Assessment,* Andrew Canale wrote,

> [New Age author David Spangler] suggests that it is possible to have inclusive visions that value all people and strive to bring them to community and hope. His is a "high road" view of the New Age, a longing for a compassionate world in which hunger and poverty are alleviated, creativity is invited, deep change allowed to unfold, and exclusivity rejected. None of these values is inconsistent with Christianity. In fact, Christianity at its best lives by the same principles. Viewed in this light, Christianity and the New Age movement need not compete. Rather, they need to cooperate with each other for the sake of the desperate ones.[21]

Evangelicals accustomed to the postmodern climate of today may very well find it hard to resist an argument such as that. The appeal for dialogue, the quest for common ground, and the plea for peace with New Age spirituality are all perfectly consistent with the approach to handling religious differences many evangelicals have already begun to favor.

But those committed to biblical authority and historic evangelical principles will likely see things differently, and remain vigilant.

ENDNOTES

[1]Dennis Diehl, "Washed in the Water of Aquarius and Not the Blood of Aries: A New Paradigm," n.p. [cited 20 December 2006]. Online: http://ezinearticles.com/?Washed-in-the-Water-of-Aquarius-and-Not-the-Blood-of-Aries---A-New-Paradigm&id=143295.

Diehl is a former minister in the Worldwide Church of God who became disillusioned when leaders of that sect began to modify their doctrines. He embraced New Age spirituality and now uses biblical imagery as allegory for New Age teachings. One of his online articles is titled "The Bible God—Trading Up—We Can Do Better" (See http://ezinearticles.com/?expert_bio=Dennis_Diehl).

[2]Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 513.

[3]I have outlined a simple description of postmodernism in a seminar for pastors titled "A Beginner's Guide to Postmodernism." An audio recording of that seminar is freely downloadable at: http://www.swordandtrowel.org/PJ-CDA14.htm.

[4]Elaine Murray, "New Age Spirituality," n.p. [cited 20 December 2006]. Online: http://www.sideroad.com/New_Age_Spirituality/new_age_spirituality.html.

[5]The Church of Scientology, started by science-fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard and based on ideas he experimented with first in his novels, promises a classically New Age version of enlightenment and empowerment through pseudoscientific means.

[6]Shirley MacLaine, *Out on a Limb* (New York: Bantam, 1983).

[7]Ibid., 209.

[8]Shirley McLaine, *Dancing in the Light* (New York: Bantam, 1985), 339.

[9]Shirley MacLaine, *Going Within* (New York: Bantam, 1989), 57.

[10]Constance Cumbey, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow: The New Age Movement and Our Coming Age of Barbarism* (Shreveport: Huntington House, 1985).

[11]Dave Hunt, *Understanding the New Age Movement* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1988).

[12]Douglas Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1986).

[13]Elliot Miller, *A Crash Course on the New Age Movement: Describing and Evaluating a Growing Social Force* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989).

[14]Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1980).

[15]Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: Religion, Culture and Society in the Age of Post Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

[16]Steve Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age* (Oxford: Routledge, 2003).

[17]George Barna, *The Index of Leading Spiritual Indicators* (Dallas: Word, 1996), 22.

[18]"Trends Among Christians in the U.S.," n.p. [cited 20 December 2006]. Online: http://www.religioustolerance.org/

chr_tren.htm.

[19]Cf. Elmer L. Towns, *An Inside Look at 10 of today's Most Innovative Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 249.

[20]Barna, *The Index of Leading Spiritual Indicators*, 130.

[21]Andrew Canale, "The Cry of the Desperate: Christianity's Offer of a New Age," in *New Age Spirituality: An Assessment* (ed. Duncan S. Ferguson; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 6.

The *SBJT* Forum: Thinking about True Spirituality

Editor's Note: Readers should be aware of the forum's format. D. A. Carson, Mark Coppenger, Joel R. Beeke, and Pierre Constant have been asked specific questions to which they have provided written responses. These writers are not responding to one another. The journal's goal for the Forum is to provide significant thinkers' views on topics of interest without requiring lengthy articles from these heavily-committed individuals. Their answers are presented in an order that hopefully makes the forum read as much like a unified presentation as possible.

SBJT: Could you briefly lay out the opportunities and dangers in the current interest in spirituality?

D. A. Carson: So many books on the subject of spirituality have been written during the last two or three decades that it is an impertinence to address the topic in a few paragraphs. In the hope that brevity may serve some useful functions, however, I'm inclined to say at least the following.

Before I answer the question directly, it is worth remembering that "spirituality" has an intellectual history that is worth thinking about. I summarized that history elsewhere (in an Appendix to *The Gagging of God*), and I need not repeat here everything I said there. Nevertheless a handful of remarks from that survey will not go amiss. (1) Until a few decades ago, "spirituality" was not an expression much used in Protestantism. Nowadays, however, the expression is used not only by Catholics and Protestants alike, but also by almost everyone, including completely unchurched people who think of themselves as in many respects secular. "Spiritual" may hint at some sort of connection to eastern religions or to new age thought, but it might mean something like "aesthetic," and it might be tied to fairly mystical quasi-materialist beliefs (e.g., some keep crystals close to them in the belief that they vibrate and improve the holder's "spirituality"). (2) In the Western world, the term was, as I've just said, until recently tied to Catholicism. But what did Catholics mean by it? One of their usages meant something like "devotional." While Protestants might write either academic or "devotional" commentaries, Catholics might write either academic or "spiritual" commentaries—and meant much the same thing. (3) Another traditional Catholic usage that stretches back many centuries has to do with forms of *superior* Christian experience. In other words, ordinary Christians might believe certain things and act in certain ways, but to be a really *spiritual* Christian meant to engage in certain ascetic practices, adopt certain spiritual discipline, and so forth. In other words, to be "spiritual" was something akin to being a more serious Christian, or a more advanced Christian, or a more holy or godly Christian. (4) Because "spirituality" today is often applied not only to Protestants and Catholics alike, but also to adherents of completely non-Christian religions—for instance, many writers probe what we ought to be learning from, say, Buddhist "spirituality"—the word is

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less and less tied to any identifiable belief structure, and more and more tied to technique. The assumption is that techniques of "spirituality" may be readily transferred from religion to religion, from belief structure to belief structure.

So now it is time to address the question directly. *First*, some of the opportunities bound up with current interest in this vague thing called "spirituality" may usefully be identified.

(1) Although the term "spirituality" as it is now used is astonishingly broad, it usually signals a reluctance on the part of those who espouse it to embrace philosophical materialism. In other words, being committed to "spirituality" usually means one is committed to a universe that has something in it beyond matter, energy, space, and time. The sheer reductionism of philosophical materialism is thus avoided, even if the nature or even the rationale of this "spirituality" is more than a little fuzzy. That means the beginning point in conversation with such "spiritual" people is never quite the same as with, say, a scientist committed to philosophical materialism.

(2) Epistemologically, those who espouse "spirituality" are more open to diverse channels of acquiring "knowledge" than are those who buy into logical positivism. To (over)simplify: While logical positivists think that the only things human beings can "know" are those that are tied by observation and reason to the material world, those interested in "spirituality" are open to intuitions, faith, extra-sensory perception, aesthetics, and sometimes a range of supernatural beings. I am far from saying that all of these epistemological claims are wise or defensible; I am merely saying that they avoid one common form of reductionism, and so how people may come to "know" things about Jesus, and truly to "know" him, can happily proceed along broader lines than those acknowledged by reason alone or by the senses alone.

(3) In particular, those who espouse "spirituality" can be praised for their appreciation of the complexity of human existence, of a non-material component. One remembers Paul's careful opening remarks when he addresses the Areopagus: "I see that in every way you are very religious." He then adduces, as evidence, their "objects of worship" and even the altar "To an Unknown God." Today, for most people in the Western world, being labeled "religious" would not be taken as any sort of compliment, ambiguous or otherwise. I suspect that if Paul were beginning his address today in New York of Chicago or L.A., he would say, "I see that in every way you are very spiritual." Of course, that would not prevent Paul from chiding them for some of their understanding of what it means to be "spiritual," or from providing a Christian understanding of what it means to be "spiritual"—just as he insists on a Christian understanding of true "religion." Nevertheless, as the apostle detects some measure of common humanity in the desire to be "religious," we ought to detect some measure of common humanity in the desire to be "spiritual."

That brings us to the *second* part of the question: What are the dangers in the current interest in spirituality?

(1) For many people, "spirituality" is a word with only positive connotations—a bit the way "apple pie" or "motherhood" functioned in the Eisenhower years. The upshot is that encouraging people to be discerning in spiritual matters sounds hyper-critical, for it presupposes that not

everything that passes for spirituality is good. Yet diminished discernment is rarely a good thing, and so we have to make the attempt to avoid the clichés surrounding "spirituality" and try to encourage rigorous biblical fidelity.

(2) The result of the current naïveté about spirituality is that many people have begun to appeal to their own mystical experiences over against claims of truth. An explanatory aside: Historically, people have tended to base their religious claims on reason, mysticism, or revelation. This is not to say that there may not be some overlap of these categories, of course, but this analytical breakdown is helpful. The current appeal to spirituality is very largely an appeal to highly diverse forms of mysticism—forms that brook very little space for revelation in any biblical sense, and not even much for reason. Another way of saying this is that personal experience trumps everything; indeed, it becomes an end in itself, which of course feeds that which, from the biblical perspective, lies at the heart of human rebellion, namely, self-interest.

(3) To put this another way: the current shape of spirituality largely sidesteps very substantial matters dealing with history and truth. Did Jesus rise from the dead, or did he not? If he did, what does his resurrection mean? What does it say about his own personal claims and his own understanding of the human beings? Is he truly the unique Son of God, the "Word made flesh"? From a biblical perspective, can one be "spiritual" while still rejecting the Son of God? And such matters as these are nestled within huge questions of worldview: human beings are important because we have been created in the image of God; we are guilty because we have chosen to go our own way; salvation consists first and foremost in being reconciled to the God from whom we have alienated ourselves, and whose judgment we must face; the only escape is what this God has provided. Within that sort of framework, then, Paul insists that the "natural" person, the person without the Spirit, "does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness" (1 Cor 2:14). Only the person who has received the Spirit, the Spirit whom Jesus himself bequeathed and who is the down payment of the ultimate inheritance, is truly "spiritual." Thus being "spiritual" is tied irrefragably to the gospel itself—in the context, to "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2:14). Even when Paul refines this fundamental polarity in the next chapter, and painfully writes that some who are "spiritual" in this fundamental sense are acting immaturely, he assumes they are Christians: their immaturity does not manifest itself in the repudiation of the Christian faith, but in one-upmanship and bickering (1 Cor 3). Certainly Christians are responsible to "keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:25). Yet the fundamental polarity of the new covenant must not be ducked: those who have the Spirit (a state bound up with saving faith in Christ and his cross-work) are spiritual, and those who do not have the Spirit are not. Whatever else is said about not quenching the Spirit, about spiritual growth and knowledge of God, about conformity to Christ—all of which are regularly tied up with "spirituality" in current discussion—must begin with this fundamental polarity, or shunt to one side the Bible and the gospel it announces.

Again, one should be suspicious of generalizations of this sort: "By all means read the evangelical literature if you want to understand the cross, but if you want to

grow in spirituality, read the Catholics." The bifurcation is deeply troubling. Of course, some Catholics have understood the cross profoundly: we still sing, for instance, some of Bernard de Clairvaux's cross-centered hymns (at least we did until they were largely displaced by choruses telling God that we are worshiping him). But I have not read literature that is more "spiritual" than the best of the Puritan classics, for instance—literature that is, on the whole, deeply imbued with a profound grasp of the gospel. Is it really biblically-defined spirituality which is found in traditions that are *less* clear on the nature of the gospel?

(4) Within the broadly Christian heritage, a very large amount of current discussion turns on technique, asceticism, monastic practice, and the like. Not for a moment would I want to deny that there are degrees of knowledge of God (as there are degrees of knowing any person), and that some Christians are more mature than others. One needs only to read Philippians 3, for instance, to remember how Paul yearned for continued growth and conformity to Christ. Moreover, disciplined practices may prove to be a helpful part of such growth for some believers. For instance, Christians who commit themselves to daily reading of substantial parts of the Bible, along with the journaling that keeps records of personal reflections as one reads the text, may find themselves growing substantially. But is it the reading and journaling, *considered as techniques*, that are achieving these ends? Or is it the truth of the Word? After all, on the night he was betrayed, Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by your truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). There are myriads of passages that stress the importance of meditating on, believing in, obeying, learning, memorizing ("hiding in one's heart"), God's truth; there are none that mandate journaling. I hasten to insist that I am not unalterably opposed to journaling. But I am deeply suspicious of any appeal to technique in spirituality that is not mandated by Scripture, the more so if it has the effect of masking what the Scripture is actually talking about.

Sometimes the technique that is being urged is so heavily horizontal that it barely acknowledges God. One recent influential book, for instance, urges us to move through distinct phases of spiritual exploration, regardless of the particular object of our faith (i.e., what we believe is unimportant; the categories of spiritual growth are sociologically determined): (1) discovery, i.e., we find God on the particular path we have chosen; (2) belonging, i.e., we attach ourselves to a particular group; (3) working, i.e., we commit ourselves to this religious cause; (4) questioning, i.e., at some point we may begin to wonder what we are doing here; (5) the wall, i.e., we hit an impasse; (6) living with uncertainty, i.e., we work through the impasse and choose deeper confidence on the God we believe in, while we hold other things more loosely; (7) living in love, i.e., we learn better how to live for God and others. Regardless of the accuracy or inaccuracy of this sociological profile, it is utterly detached from *any* particular belief system, including the gospel. We are a long way from 1 Corinthians and Galatians, from the Farewell Discourse, from Ephesians, from Matthew's form of the Great Commission.

What we must see is that only what is valuable is counterfeited. One does not bother to counterfeit pennies; one counterfeits $20 bills or $100 bills. A great deal of biblically-mandated spirituality is

counterfeited by those who will not come under the biblical frame of reference, precisely because *biblical* spirituality is glorious, so it seems worth counterfeiting. Sadly, Christians are easily taken in by such counterfeits, unless they relentlessly return to Scripture to test all things.

(5) It may seem a tad harsh to say it, but in my experience, many (though certainly not all) of those who buy into contemporary approaches to spirituality have no hesitation about saying things like "I really am quite a spiritual person." This is not surprising. Once spirituality is tied to technique, personal mysticism, and self-discipline, it can easily become a basis for pride. This is a long way removed from the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5).

Perhaps it is the fruit of the Spirit that gives us an important clue to what we should be pursuing. We often encourage people to memorize the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit, but observe carefully the references to the Spirit in the context: "So I say, *walk by the Spirit*, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to *the Spirit*, and *the Spirit* what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led *by the Spirit*, you are not under the law. . . . But *the fruit of the Spirit* is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we *live by the Spirit*, let us *keep in step with the Spirit*. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other" (Gal 5:16ff.). This is where our future lies: walking by the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, keeping in step with the Spirit, growing in the fruit of the Spirit. Here is spirituality alive with Christ-centered awareness, a passionate desire to bring glory to God and good to his people, a love and a joy and a peace, and all the rest, that are cruciform.

SBJT: Is there a connection between ethics and spirituality?

Mark Coppenger: A connection, yes, but not airtight. Sometimes, the lost can outthink and outperform Christians, even believers who have a regular "quiet time." Southern Baptist resolutions on abortion provide a case in point. For years, godly pastors were acting under the influence of abortion enablers and crusaders at our seminaries and denominational offices. Thus, in the early 1970s, the Convention favored abortion when there was "clear evidence of severe fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother." Not until the conservative resurgence of the 1980s did Southern Baptists officially oppose abortion "except to save the life of the mother." It finally occurred to them that a death sentence for "severe fetal deformity" was eugenic murder and that deferring to "the emotional health of the mother" gave a blank check to those who found pregnancy inconvenient.

Meanwhile, Jewish atheist Nat Hentoff, without benefit of "spirituality," was concluding that the "severely deformed" were precious. In "The Awful Privacy of Baby Doe," he railed against the parents who wanted their Downs baby to die of starvation and dehydration ("The Awful Privacy of Baby Doe," *Atlantic* [January, 1985], 50), and later, he castigated the Democrats for marginalizing Pennsylvania governor Robert Casey for his pro-life stance ("Life

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of the Party," *The New Republic* [June 19, 2000]). Even in his lost condition, Hentoff got things right.

So how can those who are dead in sin be ethically perceptive? Romans 1:26-27 teaches that certain behaviors are unnatural; God's ethical commands are not arbitrary. And, as C. S. Lewis demonstrated in *The Abolition of Man*, non-believers can be morally perceptive. Clearly, some behaviors (such as adultery, drunkenness,lying) are destructive, and others (such as industry, sobriety, fidelity) are salubrious. Furthermore, as Rom 2:14-15 teaches, even pagans have God's law written on their hearts, pricking or easing their consciences appropriately.

This does not mean, however, that it is merely a toss-up. The fruit of spiritual vitality is overwhelmingly bountiful, and the fallout from spiritual deadness is staggering. In the former connection, George Muller is a famous example. Repeatedly, he began the morning in both poverty and prayer, only to find provision, before sundown, for orphans in his care (*The Autobiography of George Muller* [Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1984], 146-53). And devotion can have broad cultural implications as well: "In the long view of history, the [American] Civil War can be seen as the last chapter in the Christian story of the Second Great Awakening. In the North, one of the reforms inspired by the revival was abolition, the drive to abolish slavery" (Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], 314). Then, at the far opposite end of the spiritual/ethical spectrum, an atheistic Mao Tse-Tung "was responsible for well over 70 million deaths in peacetime, more than any other twentieth-century leader" (Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *The Unknown Story of Mao* [New York: Knopf, 2005], 3). Godlessness kills.

How does spiritual deadness result in evil? The Bible clearly teaches that a corrupt heart issues in corrupt behavior (Mark 7:21-22). Televangelist Jim Bakker agrees, tracing his adultery to jealousy (*I Was Wrong* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996], 13-24). He went on to write a confessional book, *I Was Wrong*, but most sinners prefer excuse to repentance. In this vein, E. Michael Jones, the Catholic editor of *Culture Wars* magazine, argues that misbehaving cultural elites, such as Paul Tillich and Pablo Picasso, were masters at changing the subject—and the rules (E. Michael Jones, *Degenerate Moderns: Modernity as Rationalized Sexual Misbehavior* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993], 17, 127-51). Straying into sexual immorality, they crafted ideologies to justify themselves. Anthropologist Margaret Mead was another offender. Saturated with her own sexual sin, she wrote the poorly researched *Coming of Age in Samoa* to prove that "open marriage" was the way of innocents in the South Seas (Jones, *Degenerate Moderns*, 19-41). So, in her own mind, she was a noble primitive instead of a furtive, decadent academic.

The term *spirituality* has been emptied of virtually all meaning, hence, the confusion when New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft attributed his team's first Super Bowl victory to their "spirituality" (See a positive reflection on his statement in Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, "Why G-d Sided With the Patriots: The devout Kurt Warner represented righteousness over unity—and lost," online: http://www.beliefnet.com/story/99story_9930.html.) One had to wonder whether it was the spirituality of the Crusaders who sacked Constantinople, Buddhist spirituality

which suppresses the desire for personal stardom, the Hindu spirituality of Kali the annihilator, or Quaker spirituality encouraging quiet reflection on the lessons of the game in progress.

One should stipulate Christian spirituality, but even that is not enough. A roll call of self-identified Christian mystics will show a conflicting variety of causes and prescriptions from the likes of Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, Meister Eckhart, Ignatius of Loyola, John of the Cross, George Fox, and William Law (Georgia Harkness, *Mysticism: Its Meaning and Message* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1973])—not to mention the "charismatic chaos" chronicled by John MacArthur (*Charismatic Chaos* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992]).

So it requires *sound* Christian spirituality. There have to be biblical checks on devotional perceptions, for some seem to think that it is enough to be gloriously saved and Spirit-filled to do right: "Just love Jesus with all your heart and then do what comes naturally." But Paul's epistles show that the fellowship of ever-less-than-perfect saints needs a lot of written and spoken coaching to avoid wasted motion or even shipwreck, whether the topic is lawsuits, hairstyles, or slave behavior. And then there is the danger of quietism or "pietistic individualism," whereby the spiritually-edified saint cultivates his serenity to the neglect of messy and troubling social and political engagement ("Pietistic individualism" was the concern of Reinhold Niebuhr, who had feared that Billy Graham's 1957 crusade in New York City would pull believers from the public square, where he had lost liberal friends by advocating U.S. participation in World War II. See Andrew S. Finstuen, "The Prophet and the Evangelist: The Public 'Conversation' of Reinhold Niebuhr and Billy Graham," *Books & Culture* [July/August 2006]: 9.).

Nevertheless, sound, Christian spirituality can be wonderfully *antiseptic* (neutralizing sinful thought) and *nutritional* (feeding the soul starved for insight)—and the impact on public policy as well as personal morality has been proven to be considerable.

Unfortunately, knowing the right path does not imply that one will follow it. Decency is as much a matter of the will as the intellect. Ethicists, such as Alasdair MacIntyre and William Bennett (See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* [South Bend: Notre Dame, 1981]; and William J. Bennett, *The Book of Virtues* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993]), have picked up on this in recent years. Focusing on more than the morality of war, abortion, lying, etc., they now also speak of self-discipline, compassion, courage, perseverance, and loyalty—what it takes to follow through on one's convictions, the morality of the *actor* as well as the morality of the *act.* This attention to virtue tracks with the Spirit fruit named in Gal 5:22 and the cultivation of spiritual disciplines, reflected in 1 Tim 4:7-8.

No, we cannot be saved by ethics. Yes, our moral calculations and deeds are tainted by sin, hobbled by finitude. But essential truth is attainable and choices can be praiseworthy, particularly when the resources of regeneration and sanctification are in play.

SBJT: Could you discuss the Puritan practice of biblical meditation? How can we learn from them today?

Joel R. Beeke: The word *meditate* or *muse* means to "think upon" or "reflect." "While I was musing the fire burned," David said

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(Ps 39:3). It also means "to murmur, to mutter, to make sound with the mouth…. It implies what we express by one talking to himself" (William Wilson, *OT Word Studies* [McLean, Va.: MacDonald Publishing, n.d.], 271). Thinking, reflecting, or musing presupposes a subject on which to meditate. Formal meditation implies weighty subjects. For example, philosophers meditate on concepts such as matter and the universe, while theologians reflect on God, the eternal decrees, and the will of man.

The Bible often speaks of meditation. Genesis 24:63 says, "Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening." Despite Joshua's demanding task of supervising the conquest of Canaan, the Lord commanded Joshua to meditate on the book of the law day and night so that he might do all that was written in it (Josh 1:8). Moses, Mary, Paul, and Timothy all meditated.

The term *meditation*, however, occurs more often in the Psalms than in all other books of the Bible put together. Psalm 1 calls that man blessed who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night. In Ps 63:6, David speaks of remembering the Lord on his bed and meditating on Him in the night watches. Psalm 119:148 says, "My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promise" (Cf. Ps 4:4; 77:10-12; 104:34; 119:16, 48, 59, 78, 97-99).

More than any other group in church history, the Puritans wrote about meditation from a strictly biblical point of view**.** They never tired of saying that biblical meditation involves thinking upon the Triune God and His Word. By anchoring meditation in the living Word, Jesus Christ, and God's written Word, the Bible, the Puritans distanced themselves from the kind of bogus spirituality or mysticism that stresses contemplation at the expense of action, and flights of the imagination at the expense of biblical content.

For the Puritans, meditation exercises both the mind and the heart; he who meditates approaches a subject with his intellect as well as his affections. Thomas Watson defined meditation as "a holy exercise of the mind whereby we bring the truths of God to remembrance, and do seriously ponder upon them and apply them to ourselves" (Thomas Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm* [Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000], 23. For similar definitions by other Puritans, see Richard Greenham, "Grave Counsels and Godly Observations," in *The Works of the Reverend and Faithfull Servant of Jesus Christ M. Richard Greenham* [ed. Henry Holland; London: Felix Kingston for Robert Dexter, 1599], 37; Thomas Hooker, *The Application of Redemption: The Ninth and Tenth Books* [London: Peter Cole, 1657], 210; Thomas White, *A Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation with Instances of the Several Kindes of Solemn Meditation* [London: for Tho. Parkhurst, 1672], 13).

Edmund Calamy wrote, "A true meditation is when a man doth so meditate of Christ as to get his *heart* inflamed with the love of Christ; so meditate of the Truths of God, as to be transformed into them; and so meditate of sin as to get his heart to hate sin." He went on to say that in order to do good, meditation must enter three doors: the door of understanding, the door of the heart and affections, and the door of practical living. "Thou must so meditate of God as to walk as God walks; and so to meditate of Christ as to prize him, and live in obedience to him" (Edmund Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*).

Dozens of Puritan ministers preached and wrote on how to meditate. Meditation was a daily duty, they said, that enhanced every other duty of the Christian life. As oil lubricates an engine, so meditation facilitates the diligent use of means of grace (reading of Scripture, hearing sermons, prayer, and all other ordinances of Christ) (*Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q. 154), deepens the marks of grace (repentance, faith, humility), and strengthens one's relationships to others (love to God, to fellow Christians, to one's neighbors at large).

The Puritans wrote of two kinds of meditation: occasional and deliberate. Occasional meditation takes what one observes with the senses to "raise up his thoughts to Heavenly meditation," Calamy wrote. The believer makes use of what he sees with his eyes, or hears with his ears, "as a ladder to climb to Heaven." That's what David did with the moon and stars in Psalm 8, what Solomon did with the ants in Proverbs 6, and what Christ did with well water in John 4 (Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*).

The most important kind of meditation is daily, deliberate meditation, engaged in at set times. Calamy said deliberate meditation takes place "when a man *sets apart* . . . some time, and goes into a private Closet, or a private Walk, and there doth solemnly and *deliberately meditate of the things of Heaven*." Such deliberation dwells upon God, Christ, and truth like "the Bee that dwells and abides upon the flower, to suck out all the sweetness." It "is a reflecting act of the soul, whereby the soul is carried back to it self, and considers all the things that it knows" about the subject, including its "causes, fruites, [and] properties" (Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*). Thomas White said deliberate meditation draws from four sources: Scripture, practical truths of Christianity, providential occasions (experiences), and sermons.

Why is it our duty to meditate? The Puritans stressed the need for meditation for several reasons. First, our God commands us to meditate on his Word (Deut 6:7; Ps 19:14; Isa 1:3; Eph 1:18; 1 Tim 4:13; Heb 3:1). Second, one cannot be a solid Christian without meditating. Thomas Watson wrote, "A Christian without meditation is like a soldier without arms, or a workman without tools. Without meditation the truths of God will not stay with us; the heart is hard, and the memory slippery, and without meditation all is lost" (*The Sermons of Thomas Watson*). Third, without meditation, the preached Word will fail to profit us. Reading without meditation is like swallowing "raw and undigested food," wrote Henry Scudder (Henry Scudder, *The Christian's Daily Walk*). Fourth, without meditation, our prayers will be less effective. Manton wrote, "Meditation is a middle sort of duty between the word and prayer, and hath respect to both. The word feedeth meditation, and meditation feedeth prayer" (*The Works of Thomas Manton*). Fifth, Christians who fail to meditate are unable to defend the truth well. They have no backbone and little self-knowledge. As Manton wrote, "A man that is a stranger to meditation is a stranger to himself" (*The Works of Thomas Manton*).

In terms of general guidelines for practicing meditation, once again the Puritans are helpful. First, the Puritans said that meditation should be frequent—at least once a day. William Bates wrote, "If the bird leaves her nest for a long space, the eggs chill and are not fit for production; but where there is a constant incubation, then they bring forth: so when we leave

religious duties for a long space, our affections chill, and grow cold; and are not fit to produce holiness, and comfort to our souls" (*The Works of William Bates*).

Second, set a time for meditation and stick to that time, the Puritans advised. That will put brackets around duty and defend you "against many temptations to omission," wrote Richard Baxter (Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*).

Third, meditate "ordinarily till thou doest find some sensible benefit conveyed to thy soul." Bates said that meditating is like trying to build a fire from wet wood. Those who persevere will produce a flame. When we begin to meditate, we may first garner only a bit of smoke, then perhaps a few sparks, "but at last there is a flame of holy affections that goes up towards God." Persevere "till the flame doth so ascend," Bates said (*The Works of William Bates*).

In order to prepare oneself to meditate, Puritan writers suggest the following: Clear your heart from things of this world. Have your heart cleansed from the guilt and pollution of sin, and stirred up with fervent love for spiritual things. Approach the task of meditation with utmost seriousness. Find a place for meditation that is quiet and free from interruption. Maintain a body posture that is reverent, whether it be sitting, standing, walking, or lying prostrate before the Almighty.

In regard to the actual process of meditation, the Puritans wisely emphasized the need to ask first the Holy Spirit for assistance. Next, we should read the Scriptures, by selecting a verse or doctrine upon which to meditate. Be sure to pick out relatively easy subjects to meditate on at the beginning, and subjects that are most applicable to your present circumstances. Then, memorize the selected verse(s), or some aspect of the subject, to stimulate meditation.

Next, use your memory to focus on all that Scripture has to say about your subject. Use "the book of conscience, the book of Scripture, and the book of the creature" (*The Works of George Swinnock*) as you consider various aspects of your subject: its names, causes, qualities, fruits, and effects. Like Mary, ponder these things in your heart. Think of illustrations, similitudes, and opposites in your mind to enlighten your understanding and enflame your affections. Here's an example from Calamy. If you would meditate on the subject of sin, "Begin with the description of sin; proceed to the distribution of sin; consider the original and cause of sin, the cursed fruits and effects of sin, the adjuncts and properties of sin in general and of personal sin in particular, the opposite of sin—grace, the metaphors of sin, the titles given to sin, [and] all that the Scripture saith concerning sin" (Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*).

Next, stir up affections, such as love, desire, hope, courage, gratitude, zeal, and joy (Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*), to glorify God (Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*). Apply your meditations to yourself to arouse yourself to duty and comfort, and to restrain yourself from sin (*The Works of William Bates*). Examine yourself for your own growth in grace. Reflect on the past and ask, "What have I done?" Look to the future, asking, "What am I resolved to do, by God's grace?" (Ussher, *A Method for Meditation*). Do not ask such questions legalistically but out of holy excitement and opportunity to grow in Spirit-worked grace.

Next, turn your applications into resolutions. "Let your resolutions be firm and strong, not [mere] wishes, but resolved

purposes or Determinations," wrote Thomas White (Thomas White, *A Method and Instructions for the Art of Divine Meditation*). Conclude with prayer, thanksgiving, and Psalm singing.

The Puritans commonly meditated on the following subjects: In theology proper, the nature and attributes of God, and the works and providences of God. In anthropology, the sinfulness of sin and personal sin, and the corruption and deceitfulness of the heart. In Christology, the passion, death, and love of Christ. In soteriology, the promises of God and examination for experiential evidences of grace. In ecclesiology, the ordinances of God, such as, the Lord's Supper. In eschatology, death and judgment, and heaven and hell.

How does meditation benefit us? Here are a few of the benefits the Puritans suggest: Meditation helps us focus on the Triune God, to love and to enjoy Him in all His persons (1 John 4:8)—intellectually, spiritually, aesthetically. It helps increase knowledge of sacred truth (Prov 4:2). It is the "nurse of wisdom," for it promotes the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:8). It enlarges our faith by helping us to trust the God of promises in all our spiritual troubles and the God of providence in all our outward troubles (Calamy, *The Art of Divine Meditation*). It augments one's affections. Watson called meditation "the bellows of the affections" (*The Sermons of Thomas Watson*).

Meditation fosters repentance and reformation of life (Ps 119:59; Ezek 36:31). It is a great friend to memory and helps transfuse Scripture through the texture of the soul. It serves as a great aid to prayer (Ps 5:1) and helps us to hear and read the Word with real benefit (*The Whole Works of the Rev. W. Bates*).

Meditation stresses the heinousness of sin. It helps prevent vain and sinful thoughts (Jer 4:14) and weans us from this present evil age. It provides inner resources on which to draw (Ps 77:10-12), including direction for daily life (Prov 6:21-22). It helps us persevere in faith (*The Works of the Rev. William Bridge*). It is a mighty weapon to ward off Satan and temptation (Ps 119:11, 15).

Meditation helps us benefit others with our spiritual fellowship and counsel (Ps 66:16). It promotes gratitude for all the blessings showered upon us by God through His Son. It glorifies God (Ps 49:3) (*The Whole Works of the Rev. Oliver Heywood*).

If they could offer a concluding word, The Puritans would say to us, "If you continue to neglect meditation, it will dampen or destroy your love for God. It will make it unpleasant to think about God. It will leave you open to sin so that you view sin as a pleasure. It will leave you vulnerable and fragile before trials and temptations of every kind. In short, it will lead to a falling away from God" (Edmond Smith, *A Tree by a Stream: Unlock the Secrets of Active Meditation* [Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1995], 36).

Thomas Watson exhorted, "If you have formerly neglected it, bewail your neglect, and now begin to make conscience of it: lock up yourselves with God (at least once a day) by holy meditation. Ascend this hill, and when you are gotten to the top of it, you shall see a fair prospect, Christ and heaven before you. Let me put you in mind of that saying of Bernard, 'O saint, knowest thou not that thy husband Christ is bashful, and will not be familiar in company, retire thyself by meditation into the closet, or the field, and there thou shalt have Christ's embraces'" (*The Sermons of Thomas Watson*).

SBJT: Why do we need Jesus as our exemplar in spirituality? Can you offer some examples of how Jesus' spirituality can serve as a model for us?

Pierre Constant: Let me first define spirituality. There are some people (e.g., André Comte-Sponville in the forthcoming translation of his French book about the spirit of atheism) who believe in the existence of spirituality without making any reference to God. Actually, such forms of spirituality often borrow the values of a fundamentally Judeo-Christian ethical system. However, spirituality as we understand it here is the living out of our relationship with God though Christ. Christian spirituality, therefore, is responding to God's revelation in Christ. It is concerned with prayer, rightly interpreting Scripture, discerning the will of God and obeying it, loving and encouraging one another, and forgiving our brother or sister in Christ, to name but a few elements.

So, when it comes to spirituality, all of us need good models. We often learn more through the example of godly people than by lectures. Not that listening or reading about spirituality is of no avail, but to witness spirituality modeled by mature saints speaks volumes when it comes to living out the reality of our relationship with God.

The entire New Testament, especially the Gospels, points us to Jesus as our model of spirituality. We are here concerned not so much with spiritual disciplines, but rather with the broader contours of what it means to relate rightly to God.

The first that comes to mind is prayer. The Gospels, mostly Luke, depict Jesus praying in various contexts, such as when he is baptized, or spending all night in prayer before choosing the Twelve. Mark shows Jesus praying early in the morning, away from the noise and distractions of unceasing daily business. Luke specifies Jesus was praying when the appearance of his face changed. Jesus prayed at Gethsemane, and even on the cross.

On another occasion, after feeding the five thousand, Jesus sends his disciples away from the crowd, dismisses the crowd whose messianic expectations suddenly grew after being physically nourished, and ascends on a mountain in order to pray. On a different occasion, Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray as he finished praying.

When all is said and done about prayer, the main reason we pray is because Jesus himself prayed. His prayer, "Yet not my will, but yours be done," was not only essential in fulfilling the Father's plan of salvation and the ushering in of the New Covenant, but it also serves as the model for any prayer we are to present before the heavenly throne. While Jesus' perfect obedience to the Father in his death and resurrection is the source of our salvation and the basis of our acceptance before God (Heb 5:7), his reliance on the Father serves as the model for our own reliance upon Him.

It is also worth noting that in all their references to prayer, the Gospel writers do not focus on the time of the day, or on those bodily postures most conducive for prayer, but rather they simply show Jesus as the man of prayer.

Many others examples of Jesus' spirituality could be cited. Three must suffice. First, briefly look at corporate worship in the life of Jesus. The Gospels do not give us many details here, but a few things are worth considering. It is again Luke (4:16) who specifies that it was Jesus' custom to go to the synagogue. Moreover, a significant number of miracles occur in various

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synagogues throughout Galilee, as people gathered on the Sabbath day. Granted, the Evangelists' main point is not "Go to church because Jesus attended the synagogue services;" nevertheless, as we find specific exhortations in the epistles and in the life of the Early Church in the Acts of the Apostles as disciples meet together for worship and mutual encouragement, we see in the life of our Savior this pattern of regularly meeting with the people of God.

Second, an important part of our relationship with God concerns our relationship with His children. John writes that we cannot say we love God if we do not love our brother or sister in Christ (1 John 4:20). Loving one another is made possible, thanks to Christ's love for us, but it is also to be lived out in imitation of Christ's spirit of servanthood and humility. Jesus taught his disciples that the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, providing his disciples a living example about true greatness in the kingdom of God. Actually, we are to love one another just as He loved us; and we are to forgive one another as God forgave our own sins in Christ. Not only did Jesus teach about these attitudes as found in Matthew 18, but also Paul reminds the Philippians about the necessity of imitating Jesus' attitude in relating to one another (Phil 2:4-5): Christ's humbling himself, by both becoming a man and by being obedient unto the death of the cross, vividly portrays an essential ingredient in the outworking of our own fellowship with God and His children.

A final example deals with Jesus' reaction to suffering. True spirituality is made manifest when one is faced with opposition, hardship, and persecution, outside the safe boundaries of quiet meditation and private prayer. How can Jesus serve as an exemplar here? If all those who live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted (2 Tim 3:12), then all are called to follow the example of Jesus. To God's elect undergoing persecution, Peter writes that Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example so that we should follow in his steps (1 Pet 2:21).

Further examination of Jesus' life certainly provides many more examples of spirituality: his dependence upon the Father, his love towards his disciples, his compassion shown towards all those who came to him, his readiness to forgive sins, his individual care even when heavily solicited by crowds, his submission to the Father, and his times of fasting, resting, silence. All these were part of Jesus' living out his relationship with the Father and serve as models in our own walk with God.

Accordance 6.9. Scholars Collection CD. By Oak Tree Software, Inc. 2006. Core bundle price, $199.00.

As a professor of Greek and a member of the first generation to grow up regularly using computers, I have long taken an interest in Bible software programs. I have led training seminars on Bible software at my seminary and have written several reviews on PC-based Bible study software. For the PC, I favor BibleWorks for original language search capabilities, intuitive utility, and speed (see www.bibleworks.com). I have, however, always heard Apple users brag about the excellent Accordance Bible software. I jumped at the recent opportunity of surveying this product. I had to run the Accordance software with a "Macintosh Emulator" program on my PC laptop, so the software ran slower than on a Mac. Also, my PC initially lacked the Apple Quicktime software necessary to run the training DVD's. And, while I used a Macintosh in college and seminary, I found that the past ten years on a PC have caused me to forget some of the peculiarities of the Macintosh operating system. I used to find the Mac more intuitive than Microsoft Windows. I see, however, that there would be a learning curve to return to Apple. These initial hurdles give me pause in suggesting this software to any PC users. Based on what I have seen, I still recommend BibleWorks to all PC users. For Apple users, however, I think the story is quite different.

Unquestionably, the Accordance software is well-designed with an intuitive interface that allows multiple Bible texts and translations to be compared, as well as the quick referencing of lexicons and other tools. Before watching any of the training DVD, I found myself able to access the texts and lexicons with little difficulty. After a few DVD training sessions, my ability with the program increased dramatically. This is a good reminder that no matter how intuitive a software program claims to be, there is always a period of learning. The more time initially spent in learning the peculiarities of a program, the more intuitively-accessible and useful it will be in the long-run.

Included in the program's core bundle ($199) are morphologically-tagged NA27 and BHS texts, Louw & Nida, Thayer, BDB, and one modern Bible translation. This core bundle costs $199. Additional lexicons, texts, and reference works can be unlocked individually, or one can unlock the entire staggering array of Scholar's Collection resources for $1,799! (I am reviewing only the "Scholar's Collection," but Accordance also has other Bible study resources available on a multitude of additional CDs.)

I was surprised at the excellent selection of optional texts available to Accordance users. Of all the Bible study software I have seen, Accordance likely offers the most extensive collection of ancient primary documents and scholarly tools. In addition to standard critical editions of Biblical texts in Greek and Hebrew, available morphologically-tagged texts include the Apostolic Fathers, the Apocryphal Gospels, the Greek Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, Philo, Qumran Sectarian documents, the Targums, the Mishnah, and early Hebrew Inscriptions. These add-ons come at a price, but are no more expensive than the hard texts would be.

If I had an Apple computer, and, thus, were familiar with the Mac operating system peculiarities, I would most likely be using Accordance. I am impressed with the program—especially the excellent selection of scholarly texts and tools. For readers who have Apple computers, I add my voices to the chorus of endorsements for this fine software program.

Robert L. Plummer

Literary Lessons from The Lord of the Rings. By Amelia Harper. Nashville, NC: Homescholar Books, 2004, 622 pp., $50.00 paper.

Many Christian pastors and educators have the desire to incorporate the classics of English Literature into their reading regimens, but they fear that they are ill equipped to understand and to think critically about those works. My first observation is that the difficulty of understanding the classics has, in my opinion, been

greatly exaggerated. But having said that, I understand that it is entirely possible to receive what will pass as a fairly decent education without having read a single literary classic, and a person who finds himself in such a condition may feel intimidated by the prospect of plunging into the great books. Perhaps their perceived incompetence could be remedied by taking an introduction to literature course at a local university, but besides being time consuming and expensive, it is possible that the professor would spend more time emphasizing his particular critical approach to literature than he would spend on the literature itself.

In *Literary Lessons from The Lord of the Rings*, Amelia Harper has written a delightful introduction to literary studies, which, as the title implies, focuses on understanding one great book, J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. The same tools necessary to enjoy and critically evaluate this one classic may easily be applied to enjoying and evaluating other great books. Choosing Tolkien's work as a paradigm of great literature was a wise choice. Harper observes in the introduction, "The Lord of the Rings differs from most novels in many ways: it incorporates the use of poetry; it involves invented languages; it contains reference resources such as maps, genealogies, and chronologies; and it was written by an Oxford English professor who used his knowledge of ancient literature to create his own novel" (9).

Harper's method of instruction starts with assuming the reader has just finished reading a particular chapter from *Lord of the Rings*. She then leads the student through a brief review of the chapter, and then, in a vocabulary section, she teaches the meaning of unfamiliar words by pointing them out in their context—perhaps the most effective way of augmenting one's vocabulary. Throughout the book she introduces over 600 vocabulary words, all of which are gleaned from the pages of *The Lord of the Rings*. My favorite feature is the additional notes, in which Harper gives the reader juicy tidbits of information about Tolkein, his writing, and lots of interesting facts about Middle Earth. Perhaps more significantly, in the additional notes she introduces a wealth of literary ideas and motifs, all illustrated from the chapter under consideration. Each chapter concludes with discussion questions that require interaction with the text. There are also thirteen unit studies scattered throughout the book and two more in the appendices. These unit studies explore a wide variety of subjects that inform and enhance the study of the great books as well as *The Lord of the Rings* itself.

Literary Lessons from the Lord of the Rings was written to serve as a secondary school textbook, but it is more than suitable for anyone who would like to brush up on his literary skills or acquire those skills for the first time.

Jim Scott Orrick

Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church. By James K. A. Smith. In *The Church and Postmodern Culture Series*, ed. James K. A. Smith. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006, 146 pp., $17.99 paper.

With the arrival of *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, associate professor of philosophy at Calvin College, James K. A. Smith, provides the first volume in a new series that is intended to enhance the ongoing dialogue regarding the impact of the postmodern landscape on Christian identity and church ministry. With this goal in mind, as senior editor of this series Smith desires to engage a considerably broad audience including academicians in contemporary theology and continental philosophy as well as leading thinkers involved in the current emergent movement and church laity who are concerned about the present ethos of western culture. Such a text obviously would require a writer who is conversant with the philosophical complexities of postmodernity and able to explicate them in an accessible and lucid fashion. Smith, fortunately, has proven to be such a competent source because of his present affiliation with a growing consortium in academia known as "Radical Orthodoxy."

Herein, the author has published numerous articles and books in support of a segment of thinkers who contend that though the postmodern condition is completely justified in critiquing the modernistic myth of epistemic objectivity and autonomous rationality, it ultimately falls short because it is guilty of the same crime that the Enlightenment com-

mitted, namely it places reality in the hands of the interpreter. The only difference is that while modernity said humanity was god because of its discovery of the thinking subject or *Reason*, now postmodernity recognizes that humanity is actually a cluster of countless deities that use different kinds of *Reason*(*s*). This being said, the irony is that this very hypothesis motivates assorted "Radical Orthodoxy" advocates to see the postmodern climate as advantageous because it sets the stage for promoting a new theological approach that is both sensitive to the contextual nature of knowledge and yet still committed to the Christian faith as being true confessionally as well as ontologically. However, proponents, including Smith, want to formulate strategies that methodologically diverge from how many twentieth century conservatives previously constructed the evangelical-theological enterprise because it is argued that they had been inadvertently deceived by the metaphysical poison of modernity.

In light of this project, Smith attempts to bring his thought to mainline readership by critically interacting with what are in his mind some of the more insightful observations of postmodern thought. Not only that, he makes his case by discussing arguably the three most influential French thinkers who helped mold postmodern incredulity, namely, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Michel Foucault. Specifically, Smith explicates some of the more well-known ideas that put each of these figures on the philosophical map in hopes that the reader can get beyond reductionistic perceptions of these thinkers or what Smith calls bumper-sticker conceptions of postmodernity.

Following his introduction, Smith first deals with Derrida's concept of "nothing being outside the text." He argues that the point of this Derridian proverb is not to deny that the sum total of reality does not exist per se, but rather that all things only exist as they are connected and defined in an unending matrix of interpretive traditions. Smith then concludes that this point is exactly how Christians should understand the role of the gospel in the church, namely, that it provides the linguistic grid for defining and understanding the world in which it lives. Next, Smith then transitions to a treatment of Lyotard's infamous definition of postmodernity as "incredulity toward metanarratives." Smith claims that this well-known dictum is valid in the sense that there is no one single story or worldview that stands out as an ideology which is true because it is based on a universal, objective, transcultural rationality. So then the age-old question arises as to how do we claim that the Christian narrative is "true?" Smith apparently thinks, in accordance with his interpretation of Lyotard's point, that the "veracity" of the Christian faith is displayed in how the church becomes a kind of paradigmatic event wherein the corporate community visibly relives the redemptive acts of the biblical narrative for the world to see and encounter. Finally, Smith completes his triad of examinees by wrestling with Foucault's claim that "power is knowledge." Smith contends that Foucault is especially helpful here because he reveals the covert influence that cultures and language have in molding our worldviews at both the corporate and individual levels. Consequently, Smith asserts that with regard to proper application, it is the church's responsibility to form an environment wherein believers can be trained not just to affirm certain axioms but also to be a definitive people who think and live certain ways.

All in all, the book flows with a winsome charm as Smith keeps technical jargon to a minimum and cleverly opens each chapter with brief sketches of popular movies (such as *The Matrix*, *O Brother Where Art Thou*, and even *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*) in order to illustrate the overall points that he believes Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault were trying to assert. This strategy is so well done that most readers will be captivated by Smith's analysis and judicious flare even if they disagree with his conclusions. Also, this work is helpful because it contains a concise annotated bibliography of sources for further reading and even a short list of online resources to consult if one is interested in some of topics Smith discusses.

These contributions notwithstanding though, some concerns do stand out in this work. One relates to Smith's apparent assumption, which continues to grow among postconservative thinkers, regarding the notion that much of early twentieth-century evangelical theology imbibed from

modernistic paradigms. This mindset has been articulated in all sorts of forms in current literature but Smith's analysis and examples are sometimes tripe and even bizarre. For instance, he claims that certain denominations, which support the idea of autonomy in church polity, are actually revealing a commitment to a modified form of Cartesian individualism. After reading cursory statements like this, one is left wondering if Smith is simply misunderstanding the historical and theological background behind such ideas. Likewise, another ambiguity comes with Smith's discussion at the end of the book regarding a more aggressive consciousness of the physicality of worship. Here, Smith is picking up on the current emergent motif of having more of an emphasis on visual elements in the life and worship of the church, which fits very well within his Reformed commitments to the sacraments. However, several of his suggestions for improvement are somewhat vague and confusing at points. Finally, the most urgent concern that this work triggers is that though Smith may be on to something with regard to the criticisms of these French philosophers, the fact remains that the fundamental commitments that drove each of the thinkers were anything but Christian. This does not mean that one cannot learn from Derrida or Foucault. Yet for Smith to come across as arguing that their "fundamental" concepts, which are blatantly antithetical to Christian theism, are intrinsic or even necessary to a healthy Christian theological method and worldview is severely problematic to say the least.

So in the end, this book is an engaging read for scholars, pastors, students, and laity alike. But still, it leaves so much unsaid that one is left wondering if Smith actually thinks that Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault are helpful for evangelical Christianity because they are actually methodologically linked to Augustine, Francis Schaeffer, and Cornelius Van Til.

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The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649. By Stephen Wright. Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2006, x+278 pp., $85.00.

The emergence of the English Baptists in the seventeenth century is a subject that has attracted much attention in the past century and a half, and in the literature that has grown up around it, certain fixities have been established. Among these is the conviction that the early history of the General Baptists and that of the Particular Baptists are somewhat distinct. In this recent volume, however, Stephen Wright (Ph.D., the University of London) disputes this view and convincingly argues that the case is far more complex.

Wright begins with the General Baptists and maintains that the roots of this movement clearly lay within the matrix of Puritanism and Separatism (6-11, 13), though this Baptist grouping eventually became deeply antagonistic to both the Puritans and Separatists with whom they parted company. The General Baptist leader Thomas Helwys, for instance, was not slow to talk of both Puritanism's and Separatism's "false prophets" while his fellow General Baptist John Murton criticized the Puritans for their belief in predestination and perseverance (52-53). Yet, as Wright ably shows, continental Anabaptism did have an influence over the development of some of these General Baptists, especially with regard to the subjects of Christology and church-state relations (58-64). Moreover, Wright argues that there were some Calvinists who were a part of these congregations into the early 1640s (see 95-110). Thus, the General Baptists were not as unified as some have believed. Extremely helpful in Wright's discussion of these Baptist congregations is his setting of their local histories within the larger framework of the Jacobean Church of England and especially William Laud's attempt to right matters within a Church that he felt had become far too preoccupied with preaching.

The Particular Baptists also had Puritan-Separatist roots, but did not toss away the Calvinist soil from which they emerged in the 1630s. Yet, Wright avers, contrary to what has been commonly thought, Calvinist soteriology was initially not the organizing principle of their churches. Rather, it was the restoration of baptism that was central. Now, it has been generally held that immersion became a part of Particular Baptist life in January 1642 when, according to what is sometimes known as the "Kiffin Manuscript"—called

"Benjamin Stinton's transcript no. 2" by Wright—Richard Blunt returned from a special trip made to the Collegiants, a variety of Dutch Mennonites, in Holland to find out how to immerse believers. According to this manuscript, Blunt received advice from a certain "Jo Batte," who has long been thought to be the same as the Collegiant leader Jan Batten. Wright disputes this and argues that "Jo Batte" is more likely to have been Timothy Batte, a physician and lay preacher, who was associated with the General Baptist Thomas Lambe. Wright arrives at this somewhat startling conclusion by raising serious questions about Benjamin Stinton's abilities as a transcriber—it was he who copied the key manuscript that we possess with regard to the introduction of immersion into Particular Baptist circles—and emphasizing that both Timothy Batte and Lambe were moderate Calvinists at the time (75-89). He also points out significant links between Lambe and the first Particular Baptist pastor John Spilsbury that lend support to his argument (89-95).

Wright further maintains that the immersion of believers was taking place before the famous account involving Richard Blunt. According to Wright's investigation, Edward Barber, who later became a General Baptist, and Lambe were convinced of, and in Lambe's case practicing, baptism by immersion before the close of 1641 (97-98). Wright thus concludes that prior to the issuing of *The First London Confession* in 1644, the lines between those who would later identify themselves as Particular Baptists and some of those who would be involved with the General Baptists are far "more fluid" than has hitherto been thought. And this was due to the fact that ecclesial alignments were being made not along theological lines but "over the proper means of church formation" (110).

When, however, Lambe's congregation became increasingly open to theological novelties in the tumultuous early 1640s—in time it became typified as a source of "exotic heresies" (153)—Kiffin and Spilsbury, along with other leaders from seven Calvinistic Baptist churches in London, issued *The First London Confession* (1644) and, thus, there emerged "a self-conscious Particular Baptist denomination" that was quite distinct from the General Baptists (114-138).

The final third of the book focuses on Baptists and the political realm in the 1640s with Wright demonstrating that not all of the Particular Baptists were as politically conservative as William Kiffin (170). Some of them were definitely involved with such radical elements as the Levellers (200-210). Here Wright does some fabulous detective work to identify Baptists who held key positions within the Parliamentary Army (186-194). The tendency of the General Baptists—Wright details this from Lambe's congregation—was also to political radicalism (176-185).

Wright's central thesis concerning the relationship between the two types of English Baptists is a bold one, but he defends it with ample detail that is convincing. While I am not fully convinced of his analysis of the so-called "Kiffin Manuscript" regarding the identity of "Jo Batte," I do think that he capably shows that the situation prior to 1644 was a far more complex one with regard to Baptist identity than we have believed.

Two minor disagreements that need to be noted: the use of the term TULIP as a moniker for the theology of the Synod of Dort is anachronistic (50)—the term seems to have originated in nineteenth and twentieth-century defenses of Calvinism; and R. T. Kendall's thesis regarding the supposed gulf between the Calvinism of Calvin and that of his successor of Beza is not a reliable one (115).

Michael A. G. Haykin

The New England Theology: From Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park. Edited by Douglas A. Sweeney and Allen C. Guelzo. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006, 320 pp., $29.99 paper.

For far too long too little has been available on the men who saw themselves as the distinct heirs of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), namely those theologians who articulated what is often referred to as the New Divinity. With the renaissance of Edwards studies, though, has come a fresh interest in the thinking of that remarkable man's disciples. This is evident in relatively recent monographs on Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790), and Jonathan Edwards, Jr. (1745-1801). But even with this renewed interest in the theology of these authors, much remains to be done. The theological

perspectives of some of the central figures in this movement—men like the influential Nathanael Emmons (1745-1840) and Stephen West (1735-1819)—are still all but neglected.

Not surprisingly, little has been readily available of the primary sources of this theological movement. Limited reprints of nineteenth-century editions of the works of Hopkins, Bellamy, Emmons, and the younger Edwards had been done by Garland Publishing in the 1980s, but what has been sorely needed is a reader of the kind that Sweeney and Guelzo, both long-time students of Edwards and the New Divinity, have now put together. Ranging from selections from the "Wellspring of New England Theology"—Edwards himself—to some of those whom he personally mentored, namely, Bellamy and Hopkins, and on into the nineteenth century to the works of more distant—and some might reckon somewhat more questionable—disciples of Edwards, men such as Nathanael W. Taylor (1786-1858) and Charles G. Finney (1792-1875), this collection is indeed welcome. All of the key issues that the New Divinity dealt with are touched upon, including piety (69-132, *passim*), the New Divinity's predilection for a governmental theology of the atonement (133-48), the key role that New Divinity men played in the abolitionist movement (149-64), and a passion for missions (165-70).

Sweeney and Guelzo provide a judicious introduction to the entire collection, as well as individual introductions to each of the thirty-two pieces included. In the general introduction to the book they give a number of reasons why the New Divinity movement is important. Noteworthy among these reasons is the fact that study of this movement inevitably deepens one's understanding of the course of intellectual and theological movements in the antebellum United States.

While I would have liked to have seen something included by the evangelist Asahel Nettleton (d. 1844), a New Divinity heir of Edwards and Charles Finney's great opponent, I am thrilled with this volume and its potential for helping students of this era in American theological history appreciate the impact of the New Divinity men and their thought.

Michael A. G. Haykin

Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership. By Phil A. Newton. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005, 176 pp., $13.99 paper.

There has been a recent proliferation of books on various aspects of polity by Baptist authors. This book, written by the pastor of South Woods Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, defends the thesis that a plurality of elders is the primary model in the NT, and that it ought to be the goal for every Baptist church today. Newton argues his thesis primarily from the NT, but also contends that plural eldership has been the primary model of leadership in both American and British Baptist life through the centuries. He pursues the historical argument in an attempt to fend off the common argument that plural elder governance is a contradiction to the Baptist conviction that the model of polity for Baptists is congregationalism.

One of the key issues in discussions over plural elders has to do with whether there is a distinction between "ruling elders" and "teaching elders." This was a distinction made by Calvin in his interpretation of 1 Tim 5:17, but many interpreters believe this is a false distinction, especially in light of the fact that 1 Tim 3:2 indicates that all elders need to be "able to teach." Newton deals with this issue by making a distinction between teaching and preaching (42). He argues that the "call to preach or ability to fill the pulpit is not required of elders" (145). What Newton fails to do is to show how "teaching" and "preaching" stand in such stark contrast to one another, especially in light of the fact that the Pastoral Epistles make it clear that teaching is the primary task of the "overseer."

There is good advice in this volume about how to help a church make the transition from being single-pastor-led to being plural-elder-led. What is not clear in this book is an answer to the question, biblically, of whether every church ought to make such a transition to a plural-elder ministry. Anyone curious about dealing with this issue ought to read this book; such a person ought also to be encouraged to read more than simply this book.

Chad Owen Brand

The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture. By Richard B. Hays. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005, xx + 213 pp., $20.00.

Hays is one of the important North American scholars investigating Paul's relationship to the Scriptures of Israel. Hays was one of the first researchers not only to study Paul's many direct quotations of the Old Testament but also to consider the manifold allusions to Scripture. The methodology and potential of this approach was set forth in Hays' study *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. Other scholars have built on Hays' methods and insights. In the present volume Hays gathers ten essays from 1980-1999 on Paul as interpreter of Israel's Scripture (all previously published, some of them revised and expanded for inclusion in the present volume). The collection intends to advance three theses (viii): "(1) the interpretation of Israel's Scripture was central to the apostle Paul's thought, (2) we can learn from Paul's example how to read Scripture faithfully; (3) if we do follow his example, the church's imagination will be converted to see both Scripture and the world in a radically new way." While the first thesis reflects the current consensus in most quarters of Pauline scholarship, the other two are controversial and likely will continue to be. Evangelicals will appreciate the desire to learn from Paul "how to read Scripture faithfully," though their conclusions of what this entails may differ from Hays.

In the Introduction (viii-xvii) Hays outlines why Paul's biblical interpretation (and also the use of the OT in other sections of the New Testament) has received so much attention in recent scholarship, namely,

> the post-Holocaust reassessment of Judaism and the Jewish roots of Christianity, renewed dialogue between Jewish and Christian interpreters; the demise of modernist historicism as a dominant hermeneutical paradigm; the emergence of 'intertextuality' as a vital perspective in literary-critical studies; growing interest in the biblical canon as a significant context for theological hermeneutics; and the concern within 'postliberal' theology to reconnect with the particular ways of reasoning that are integral to the classic Christian confessional tradition (ix).

Hays then shares his own journey and development with Paul as biblical interpreter. Early on Hays had a persistent sense that the church was in great need of a better way of approaching the Bible. The usual options on offer were some version of liberal demythologizing on the one hand and conservative literalism on the other. Each option was, in its own way, rigid and unimaginative, and neither was life-giving for the community of faith. Most tellingly, neither approach seemed able to account adequately for the ways in which Paul actually read biblical texts. In contrast to the demythologizing hermeneutic, Paul celebrated Scripture's witness to the real and radical apocalyptic action of God in the world; in contrast to the literalist hermeneutic, Paul engaged Scripture with great imaginative freedom, without the characteristic modernist anxiety about factuality and authorial intention (ix).

While this is not the place for a detailed defence of what Hays describes as "conservative literalism," one should note that with his use of Scripture Paul was *within* the boundaries of Early Jewish exegesis of Scripture that limited his "great imaginative freedom." This was shown by several studies of Paul's quotations from the OT. In addition, when Paul refers to events of OT history, does he not presuppose their factuality? Compare, for example, Paul's reference to the election of Abraham and his descendants in Rom 9:7-12 or to Elijah's plea with God against Israel in Rom 11:2-5. Also Paul seems to understand "the things written for our instruction" in 1 Cor 10:1-11 as historical events. Because Paul regards these biblical events *as having actually taken place, they can be monitory and instructive for his churches*. Paul's understanding of Scripture as divinely inspired (1 Tim 3:16f) would likely have had an impact on his relationship to "authorial intent."

There is also a question to be raised about Paul's alleged "great imaginative freedom." Paul, the slave of Christ, hardly would have characterized his letters this way: his message is under the constraint of Christ. One may gladly admit that this is freedom, but this is not freedom of the imagination in the usual sense.

Hays describes the purpose of his quest as follows:

> to explore what Scripture looks like from within Paul's imaginative narrative world. The

> result of the exploration . . . is to discover a way of reading that summons the reader to an epistemological transformation, a conversion of the imagination. The fruit of such a conversion is described in this book's culmination essay, 'A Hermeneutic of Trust'" (x).

Hays then provides a brief introduction to each of the following essays (x-xv).

The introduction closes with a fine summary of Paul's interpretation of Scripture in five points (xvf):

> (1) Paul's interpretation of Scripture is always a pastoral community-forming activity. His readings are not merely flights of imaginative virtuosity; rather, they seek to shape the identity and actions of a community called by God to be bearers of grace. (2) Paul's readings of Scripture are *poetic* in character. He finds in Scripture a rich source of image and metaphor that enables him to declare with power what God is doing on the world in his own time. (3) Paul reads Scripture *narratively*. It is not for him merely a repository of isolated proof texts; rather, it is the saga of God's election, judgement, and redemption of a people through time. Paul sees the church that has come into being in his own day as the heir of that vast ancient story and as the remarkable fulfilment of the promises made to Israel. (4) The fulfilment of those promises has taken an entirely unexpected turn because of the world-shattering apocalyptic event of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus. When he rereads Israel's Scripture retrospectively, Paul finds numerous prefigurations of this revelatory event—which nevertheless came as a total surprise to Israel and continues to function as a stumbling block for those who do not believe. Paul seeks to teach his readers to read Scripture *eschatologically*. (5) Finally, Paul reads Scripture *trustingly*.

The following essays are included: "The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians" (1-24); "'Who Has Believed Our Message?' Paul's Reading of Isaiah" (25-49); "Psalm 143 as Testimony to the Righteousness of God" (50-60); "Abraham as Father of Jews and Gentiles" (61-84); "Three Dramatic Roles: The Law in Romans 3-4" (85-100); "Christ Prays the Psalms: Israel's Psalter as Matrix of Early Christology" (101-18); "Apocalyptic Hermeneutics: Habakkuk Proclaims 'The Righteous One'" (119-42); "The Role of Scripture in Paul's Ethics" (143-62). "On the Rebound: A Response to Critiques of *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*" (163-89).

In "A Hermeneutic of Trust" (190-201) Hays starts with a critique of the often practised hermeneutic of suspicion. Its practitioners "endlessly critique the biblical texts but rarely get around to hearing Scripture's critique of us, or hearing its message of grace" (191). He then reflects on Paul's references to faith and unbelief in Romans, the relationship between trust and atonement and of Paul's own interpretative practice (also based on Romans). After his encounter with the risen Christ, Paul applied a new hermeneutic to the Scriptures:

> In Paul's fresh reading of Scripture the whole mysterious drama of God's election of Israel, Israel's hardening, the incorporation of Gentiles into the people of God, and Israel's ultimate restoration is displayed as foretold *in Scripture itself*—but this foretelling can be recognized only when Scripture is read through the hermeneutic of trust. God's oracles and promises are interpreted anew, in ways no one could have foreseen, in light of the experience of grace through the death and resurrection of Jesus (197).

Hays then describes the components of such a hermeneutic of trust. In order to read Scripture rightly, "we must *trust* the God who speaks through Scripture" (197). There is to be suspicion, but of a different kind: "suspicion first of all of ourselves, because our own minds have been corrupted and shaped by the present evil age (Gal 1.4). Our minds must be transformed by grace, and that happens nowhere more powerfully than through reading Scripture receptively and trustingly with the aid of the Holy Spirit" (198). Finally Hays demands that "the real work of interpretation is to *hear* the text. We must consider how to read and teach Scripture in a way that opens up its message, a way that both models and fosters trust in God." He ends with a trenchant but pertinent criticism:

> So much of the ideological critique that currently dominates the academy fails to achieve these ends. Scripture is critiqued but never *interpreted*. The critic *exposes* but never *exposits*. Thus the word itself recedes into the background, and we are left talking only about the politics of interpretation, having lost the capacity to *perform* interpretations (198).

While this last essay answers fewer questions than it raises (and some of my answers would be different), it nevertheless contains many

astute observations and invites further reflection. An index of names (202-05) and of Scripture and other ancient literature (206-13) close this inspiring volume.

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Believers: A Journey into Evangelical America. By Jeffery Sheler. New York: Viking, 2006, 324 pp. $24.95.

In recent years the national media has begun to recognize the influence of evangelicals in American life, perhaps most notably in giving voice to such scholars as Darrell Bock, Ben Witherington, and Craig Evans in network specials on Jesus, *The DaVinci Code*, and the like. In the print media a great deal of ink has been devoted to the impact of evangelicals in the election of George W. Bush. On the other hand, this newfound respectability that evangelicals seem to have obtained has yet to trickle down to the level of primetime dramas (think *Law and Order* here for example) that continue to cast evangelicals as intolerant fundamentalists.

Into this breach steps Jeffery Sheler, religion editor for *US News and World Report* and author of *Is the Bible True?* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2000). Determined to demystify the stereotype of "fundies" typically held by his colleagues and the public-at-large, and having started out fundamentalist in Grand Rapids and eventually settling into a "conservative" Presbyterian congregation in Washington D.C., Sheler decided that it was up to an ex-believer like himself to set the record straight.

In *Believers: A Journey into Evangelical America*, he visits the Focus on the Family ministry headquarters, Saddleback Church, Wheaton College, the Creation festival (an outdoor contemporary Christian rock/folk fest), political operatives in Washington, and goes on a mission trip to Guatemala with a church group.

After a few inconsequential visits elsewhere, Sheler visits the Focus on the Family ministry headquarters in Colorado Springs. He is there to interview James Dobson, who many consider to be America's most influential evangelical. Politics "dominates" his interview with Dr. Dobson (Dobson was formerly a practicing child psychologist), though acknowledging that the focus on politics was clearly irritating Dobson. Latching onto a touring Brethren couple on his way out of Focus on the Family headquarters, he discovers that "common" people do not think Dobson should focus so much on politics; they liked him much better when he talked family.

Moving on, he next gives high marks to Rick Warren, Saddleback Church, and Wheaton College, seeming at times wistful as if recalling the better angels of his fundamentalist past. The chapter on Wheaton perhaps makes the most poignant observation in the book (at least from the viewpoint of the uninitiated). Evangelical Christianity in America is no longer characterized by the anti-scholastic stance it adopted in the 1930s.

Oddly, in the Saddleback segment, Sheler recounts a conversation with a just-baptized couple who claimed that prior devotion to a Wiccan goddess brought them closer to Christ. After reading *Mere Christianity*, they became open to explore Saddleback where "one of the main tenets of this church is that you believe in Christ, but it's not exclusionary to that extreme (people who are not Christians are going to hell)." Sheler points out that they probably were not ready for the "meat" (though clearly Saddleback, in spite of having a seeker-sensitive orientation, does not embrace universalism in any form).

Perhaps the highest mark Sheler gives is to a group of lay churchmen from Alabama who habitually go short-term to Guatemala to aid in construction. As if to offset their sacrifice, he mentions an agnostic woman who has given up everything to join the staff of Habitats for Humanity in Guatemala. Likewise, the chapter on the Creation festival, the largest of a dozen national outdoor jam fests (of every scope) held each year, gets good press. Sheler's conclusion: Christian teens suffer the same conflict with their role in the world as their secular counterparts (though for different reasons). As with other recapitulations, Sheler's reconstruction of Christian Rock history is facile and well-documented. He notes the festival's standard of conduct in regard to the mosh pit fronting the stage area, "Just up and down … no sideways please."

Next, Sheler focuses on the presence of evangelical think tanks in Washington, following the trail of Richard Cizik, the National Association of Evangelical's liaison for government affairs. On political activism in the evangelical ranks, Sheler is generally both irenic and agnostic in his analysis, suggesting that, in so many words, Christian activists have graduated from the "mosh pit" to the chessboard.

In the last chapter, he interviews two prominent evangelical scholars on the emergence of evangelicals as a political force. R. Albert Mohler Jr. of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary concedes that political involvement is no longer an option, but that we need to have limited finite goals for government.

Conversely, Richard Mouw of Fuller Theological Seminary suggests that Christians need to construct a theology of engagement as a means to advance cautiously in the public square now that we are no longer socially marginalized. It is not doctrine that presented a threat to unity, but preachers and leaders who advocate for partisan politics.

Early on (65) Sheler had erroneously painted Fuller as symbolic of evangelicalism while contrasting the SBC as representative of America's fundamentalist past. Rather, it is more accurate to say that Fuller Theological Seminary is representative of British evangelicalism (meaning that it is not-quite moderate), while the SBC seminaries are, in reality, certainly much more closely representative of American evangelicalism!

It may well be that Sheler's book might accomplish what it sets out to do, that is, inform his media partners on some of the misconceptions concerning evangelicalism in America. For a novice having taken a crash course in American church history, theology, and missions, he is accurate for the most part and displays this information dispassionately.

The index itself pretty much reflects topics advanced by the media, with the most frequently cited topics being: the Republican Party (20); the NAE (18); the Southern Baptist Convention (18); Pat Robertson (18); liberalism (15); abortion (15); Billy Graham, James Dobson, and Jerry Falwell (14 each); gay marriage (12); elections (11); George W. Bush, Mark Noll, and Bible infallibility (10 each).

Yet, I must admit a certain disappointment with regard to the promotional literature heralding this release; particularly its thesis that posits a major disconnect between Christian leaders and moderately minded "common" folk. In this regard, *Believers* fails to deliver, which is surprising given the extensive analysis Sheler gave to the subject in his article, "Nearer My God to Thee": "Their distinctive faith aside, evangelicals are acting more and more like the rest of us" (*US News & World Report*, 3 May, 2004).

Actually, one cannot quite come away from reading his book without noticing that the "common" folk Sheler has in mind is the moderate himself; that is, speaking in terms of moderate theologically rather than moderate socially. Still, *Believers* is a book that many should read, if only for an enlightening look inside an outsider's look inside.

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God & Country: How Evangelicals Have Become America's New Mainstream. By Monique El-Faizy. London: Bloomsbury, 2006, 288 pp. $24.95.

The year 2006 has seen a spate of books on evangelicals. These run the gamut from those that try to correct the public perception that evangelicals are intolerant fundamentalists: *God and Country* by NY Daily News' Monique El-Faizy (Bloomsbury), *Believers* by US News & World Report's Jeffery L. Sheler (Viking), *Righteous* by Lauren Sandler (Viking), *Welcome to the Homeland* by NPR's Brian Mann (Steerforth), and *Holyland USA* by Peter Feuerherd (Crossroad); to those that try to reinforce the public perception that evangelicals are intolerant fundamentalists, principally, *Letter to a Christian Nation* by Sam Harris (Knopf) and *Thy Kingdom Come (An Evangelical's Lament): How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America* by Randall Balmer (Basic).

Of these, two are written by former "fundamentalists" themselves, Jeffery Sheler and Monique El-Faizy, and the way in which they became fundamentalist often colors the tone of their perception of evangelicalism. Sheler was a lonely teenager who decided for himself to attend a fundamentalist church in Michigan. El-Faizy, however, was brought into a fundamentalist church in Califor-

nia as an eight-year-old when her parents joined the church. For ten years she claims to have embraced these beliefs. For Sheler it was much shorter, though eventually he found his way to a decidedly less-conservative Presbyterian church in Washington D.C.

Along the way, the paths of Sheler and El-Faizy likewise intersect (though not at the same time), visiting Colorado Springs though different people, Rick Warren's Saddleback Church (CA), Wheaton College (IL), and the Creation (Christian Rock) Festival in south-central Pennsylvania. Similarly, they both deliver mostly accurate chapters dedicated to the history of evangelicalism in America, thanks in no small part to church historian Mark Noll of Notre Dame. Their paths also diverge, Sheler spending more time addressing the influence of evangelicals in politics while El-Faizy delivers a stunning and sobering assessment of the Christian media (publishing, music, and Hollywood).

Earlier in her book when El-Faizy, like Sheler, visits her original home church, then visits a section of other congregations, a repetitive theme seems to develop around the conscious attempts of Christians to sell Jesus. At first I wondered what the source of her perception was. When I finally reached chapter five, "Spreading the Word," it became clear. El-Faizy believes evangelicals are selling out in order to become kosher to the mainstream, employing the same marketing techniques as their secular counterparts to sell a softer, friendlier Jesus who, as a matter of fact, might not even get mentioned!

Thus, the problem is not that the public sees Christians as morphs of Falwell, Dobson, and Robertson, or that they once saw Christians as hapless hypocrites after the fashion of Bakker and Swaggart. The problem is that neither are true, but what is true is a problem.

Of course, from El-Faizy's perspective, it is up to the discerning reader to recognize this, as she is prone to giving mixed messages. In her chapters on Christian publishing and music, she faults evangelicals for adopting secular tactics in marketing their products. But in the chapter on Hollywood and Christian colleges, she faults evangelicals for failing to be broad enough in their perspectives. So, the moral of the story would be that evangelicals need to engage the world with caution but faithfully, recognizing that many will always criticize (Luke 7:31-35).

One poignant remark that particularly resonated with me was the observation that attending Wheaton College was a rather traumatic hurdle for many who had come with a simplistic knowledge of Scripture. I myself had undergone a similar crisis of faith when I first attended seminary, discovering that critical issues related to biblical study were much more complex than I had thought. For me, accepting the unmitigated veracity of gospel truth was indeed a crucible of trust that ultimately strengthened my personal faith. For yet others, such crises of certitude will perhaps lead to an irretrievable "falling off the wagon," an experience the author claims for herself (though in different words, of course).

Further, El-Faizy, to her credit, gives props where props are deserved. She rightly identifies Robert Schuller as the forefather of the seeker-sensitive church movement and Chuck Smith's Maranatha Music as responsible for the sea-change in American worship style and the emergence of Christian contemporary music as a force.

Like Sheler also, she occasionally stumbles in her characterizations, labeling James Dobson as a fundamentalist (rather than evangelical). She also compares the theology behind the Left Behind series as a nineteenth-century phenomena equivalent to the emergence of the horror novel (*Frankenstein, Dracula*, etc.). Perhaps the greatest divergence from Sheler is that she does not look wistfully back upon her own experience with Christianity.

For this reason, she is to be especially commended for trying to remain the objective reporter she is, and in the process, giving Christians something to chew on. This is a book to be reckoned with, and not so much for the benefit of the secularists who need to discover that Christians are really not all that different from themselves. No, this a must-read for Christians, a shot across the bow if you will.

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