

is not a threat to public peace. Furthermore, if it did become a threat it could be proceeded against under other legislation (eg. breach of the peace). And still further the argument is double-edged. Truth itself is sometimes a threat to public order, as witness the Christians who turned the world upside down.

4. To invoke the principle that blasphemy is an insult to God is to raise at once the question, "Which God?" and, by implication, the question of toleration. Jehovah, our God, is the only Lord. But to invoke penal sanctions against all that insults Him would mean proceeding against all idolatry and every major theological distortion. We should be acting against our own principles of toleration, liberty of conscience and the right of private judgement and assuming the role of persecutors, protecting our faith by the sword.

5. In conclusion it may be said that it is highly doubtful if the state is competent to define blasphemy. We should be expecting of judges a degree of theological competence they do not possess; or, alternatively, exposing ourselves to the subjective judgements of juries as to what is scurrilous, indecent or contemptuous.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Readers might also like to see what was the response of the BEC to the Law Commission - copies are available from their office at 21 Woodstock Road North, St Albans, Herts AL1 4QB price 15p post free if pre-paid.

THE PURITANS AND COUNSELLING TROUBLED SOULS

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In dealing with this subject my object is to consider the history of counselling with special attention to the Puritan approach, then to focus in detail on the Puritan method, and that in

specially selected areas which are most relevant and helpful for

us today.

Indeed the relevance of these considerations throughout is not to be lost sight of. It is precisely because of present-day problems that we are devoting our attention to this subject. Our Western culture is characterised by an abundance of affluence which tends to camouflage chronic widespread spiritual bankruptcy. One of the manifestations of this generation's spiritual poverty is the alarming increase of neuroses and mental disease. The people are resolute in their pursuit of worldly pleasure. Long ago Jeremiah likened man-made, godless pursuits to broken cisterns that could hold no water (Jer.2:13). It should not surprise us, therefore, to find that depression, frustration, loneliness and despair are commonplace and the consulting rooms of psychiatrists and psychotherapists are overcrowded. The pressures, complexities, malaise and ignorance which prevail point to the need for instruction and guidance as well as a revival of interest in basic spiritual realities and how to deal with them, not from a clinical but from a biblical point of view. Not only do non-church-goers consult psychiatrists; believers do it as well. It is sad to note that often there are as many boxes of pills to deal with tension, neuroses, strain and insomnia in believers' homes as in unbelievers'. Not only are sermons lacking in practical application and pastoral counsel but too often the personal relationship and trust necessary for counselling is lacking between church members and their elders or ministers.

The need for personal counsel has always been fundamental to man. Among pagans it is seen in recourse to witchdoctors who, despite their crack-brained deceptive arts, continue in business still. In some parts of the West it is seen in a revival of sorcery and spiritualism, the medium providing directions from the diabolical counsels of evil spirits.

1. COUNSELLING IN HISTORICAL SETTING

In Old Testament times we see implicit provision made for man to man counsel in the system of leadership instituted following the advice of Jethro (Ex.18:13-27). Advice could be sought from leaders of tens or leaders of fifties. That spiritual counsel and care was expected of the elders is clear from Ezekiel's complaints about failure in this respect: "neither have ye bound up that which was

broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away - but with force, and with cruelty, have ye ruled" (Ez.34:4).

Because the shepherds were unfaithful the flock was scattered. But through Ezekiel God promised to set up one shepherd over the flock who would feed them (Ez.34:23). This found its fulfilment in the good shepherd (John 10:11). He is the soul-counsellor par excellence who has a perfect knowledge of spiritual disease and of the remedies. His masterliness is illustrated by the way in which he spoke to the woman at the well. With directness and discretion he exposed the sin that entangled her. In the restoration of Peter after his fall we see a perfect example of thoughtfulness, gentleness and provision. Pastors look to the Lord to give them wisdom, insight, guidance, courage and strength to counsel and care for the flock of his purchase. The under shepherds will have to give account to him, the Chief Shepherd, at his judgment seat (Heb. 13:17; 2 Cor.5:10).

The apostles sought to warn every man, and teach every man in all wisdom that every man might be presented perfect in Christ Jesus (Col.1:28). The word translated warn (noutheteo) means admonish or put in mind. The idea of confrontation or counselling is included, that is counselling with all teaching and wisdom, with the sublime end in view that each one might be prepared for that great day. Jay Adams in his books ¹ has emphasised that counselling was not confined to the apostles. They encouraged believers to follow their example. Paul, writing to the Roman disciples, expressed his confidence in their ability to admonish (noutheteo) one another. Various scripture passages would seem to bear this out. Heb.10:24 says "and let us consider one another" and Gal.6:2 "bear one another's burdens" and Rom.15:7 "receive ye one another".

ROMAN CATHOLIC COUNSELLING

Augustine showed an acute interest in spiritual care, conceiving of the Church as the mother of believers. His emphasis on the subject influenced the Roman Catholic Church to a considerable degree. The writings of the Apostolic Fathers, especially that of the Pastor of Hermas, indicate concern with pastoral care.² The Franciscans, founded by Francis of Assisi in 1210, were pre-eminently pastors of the soul, but they, like those of other orders, came to subserve all things to the Church as an institution with the pope as head. Gradually in the Roman Church as a whole an

innumerable number of legalistic requirements were enforced. The auricular confession of sins to a priest became the main means of ensuring universal obedience. Jesuitism specialised in the study of questions of the conscience - casuistry, but generally the whole idea of pastoral care according to the scriptures degenerated into tyranny and legalism akin to that of the Pharisees, which our Lord detested and denounced (Matt.23). Where law-keeping is advocated for salvation there man-made rules multiply and bondage and darkness ensue. Where justification by faith is proclaimed, with love and compassion, there we will see mercy and forgiveness followed by joy and freedom, in stark contrast to the thralldom of self-righteousness and self-justification.

THE REFORMATION

It was precisely the sinners' justification by God's grace and by faith alone which Luther preached. This proclamation ushered in (as one might expect) a new age as far as personal care for souls is concerned. Through the ministry of John Calvin pastoral care made massive strides. The establishment of family visitation by the elders was one significant advance. His emphasis on Christ shepherding his people through the office-bearers was another. Both Luther and Calvin demonstrated their pastoral concern and ability to counsel souls in distress by their correspondence. The colossal correspondence maintained by these reformers who were already extremely burdened with work is a rebuke to some who, with one quarter their work-load, neglect their duty in replying to letters. Tenderness, wisdom, comfort and insight characterised the pastoral letters of the Reformers.

Calvin in particular was crystal clear in maintaining a correct relationship between the law and the gospel. He hated the Roman legalistic system with a mortal hatred. In his lucidity of thought and application of the Gospel to pastoral counselling he was followed by the English Puritans who for detail, quality and richness both of biblical exposition and application in this area are superior to any other generation of Christians. By way of contrast modern evangelicalism is in the wilderness. From the external point of view this is due to the predominance of liberalism and subservience to the authority of secular and humanistic thinking such as Freudianism and Rogerianism.³ From an internal point of view it is due to shallowness, lack of teaching and particularly the

prevalence of Arminianism in which there is confusion about the basic issue of regeneration.

2. PURITAN COUNSELLING AND THE QUESTION OF REGENERATION

Fundamental to the counselling of the Puritans was the necessity of determining the spiritual condition of the person in question. They viewed this as foundational and imperative. What is the use of counselling a person as a Christian if he is not saved? It is true that it is not possible to determine in an infallible way whether a person is regenerate but nevertheless Puritan writings demonstrate the importance of using the biblical data to ascertain this question as carefully as is humanly possible. That the question of regeneration is axiomatic is illustrated by the fact that much counselling is concerned with either the problem of assurance or desertion. ⁴

Marvellously does Robert Bolton illustrate the centrality of regeneration and justification on the one hand and the fleshly state and legalism on the other. He achieves this by exposition of the text, "The Spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" (Prov.18:14).

A man standing upon the solid ground of justification, furnished with grace and fortified with the sense of God's favour is, says Bolton, "able to pass through the pikes and conquer all comers". In other words once it is established that a man is truly reconciled to God and that God is for him, then he can be greatly strengthened through counsel and, by application of the means of grace, he will be able to defy all his enemies.

In contrast with the spirit of a justified man, which can be mightily strengthened in the day of trouble, there is the spirit of a man who has no comfort because he is at odds with God. The torture of a troubled conscience is intolerable. In all other afflictions, says Bolton, "we have to do but with man, or at worst with devils; but in this transcendent misery we are in conflict with God himself: frail man with almighty God, sinful man with that most holy God - who can abide the fierceness of his anger?" ⁵ If God's wrath is against a man all comforts fail; wife, friends, honours or pleasures!

The Scriptures lead us to compare David with Saul, Job with

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Ahithophel and Peter with Judas. History furnishes us with contrasts such as Martin Luther and Francesco Spira.⁶

These examples illustrate the importance of discerning between foundations, true or erroneous; experience, real or spurious; assurance, genuine or false. A grasp of biblical doctrine together with one's own vital experience of salvation is essential. How will we be able to discern the deception and strategies of Satan in regard to others unless we have conquered in the field of battle ourselves? If we certainly detect a false assurance in those who seek our counsel then we ought to know how to stir the conscience; how to remove ignorance of the certain wrath of God; how to depict the calamitous consequences of sin; in short, how to awaken souls to the reality of eternal damnation. Did not Felix tremble when he heard Paul reason concerning righteousness, temperance and judgment to come? (Acts 24:24,25). The less discerning today tend to be deceived when public figures speak piously about God. Felix probably did, but Paul knew him to be an adulterer and a ruthless man. Like Felix, Herod was a public figure. Herod "did many things, and heard him (John the Baptist) gladly", but soon he showed his real state by consenting to the unjust execution of the prophet.

Bolton, besides laying much stress on the necessity of discernment as to the condition of the soul, insists that no comfort is to be applied where there is no conviction of sin. "The conscience is not to be healed, if it be not wounded". John the Baptist, declared Bolton, "thoroughly frightened the minds of his hearers, with the terror of judgment, and expectation of torment - and when he had stirred them up to a desire of deliverance; then at length he made mention of Christ".⁷

That Bolton was an avid reader of earlier and contemporary writers is evident from the generous way in which he quoted them - and no more so in his book than at this point of pressing home the importance of rightly discerning the state of troubled souls. Calvin, Paul Bayne, Perkins, Hieron, Davenant, Greenham, Gouge, Rolloc, Forbes, Throgmorton and Culverwell are quoted.

Let Gouge sum up the point made by the others when he says, "God healeth none but such as are first wounded".⁸ Throgmorton is as pointed and as clear when he asserts, "The law first breaks us, and kills us with the sight and guilt of sin, before Christ cures

us, and binds us up".⁹

If, in counselling, it was found that inquirers were not Christians what procedure was followed? We are familiar with widespread present day approval of simply counselling a soul to give his heart to the Lord. To the Puritans it was necessary for a knowledge of the truth to be made effectual to salvation by the Holy Spirit. They sought to apply the Scriptures with the following ends in view. 1. Conviction of sin. 2. Humiliation before God. 3. A spirit of seeking the Lord. 4. A desire for forgiveness. 5. A confession of sin and asking for pardon. 6. Repentance. 7. Faith.¹⁰

Bolton illustrates the importance of discerning true from false repentance citing two cases from his own experience. A man in prison evidenced great broken-heartedness and penitence but as soon as the threat of execution was removed, he became, said Bolton, as bad as he was before. The second, expecting to die through an illness, professed repentance with all his heart and soul and declared that if he did recover all the world would see what a changed man he would be. As soon as he recovered, however, he became as bad, if not worse than he had ever been. Natural fear, human grief and selfish sorrow are very different in character from the "godly sorrow (sorrow toward God) that leads to repentance".

The balm of mercy and the oil of comfort must be applied at the right time. Just as the surgeon cuts out the cancer first before he sews up the wounds so spiritual physicians must deal faithfully with this corruption of the soul.

The most eloquent section of Bolton's classic on counselling afflicted consciences is that which expounds the daubers of Ezek. 13:10-16. The daubers of course are false ministers who gloss over the real issue, promote false assurance and comfort people with salvation when really they are in the grip and service of sin. Un-tempered mortar is shallow, erroneous teaching. The work of daubers will be destroyed in the judgment. Bolton describes both daubers or false ministers and those whom they have deceived as burning in hell together with the deceived crying out with hideous yells at them, "O thou bloody butcher of our souls, hadst thou been faithful, we had escaped these eternal flames".¹¹

Finally, before we leave the question of discerning the main issue

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of whether the person counselled is a Christian or not it ought to be stressed that the Puritans in no wise neglected the importance of urgency.

Thoroughness did not negate the pressing nature of the subject of salvation. "To refuse Christ freely and fairly offered," declared Bolton, "is to receive God's curse under seal, and to make "Thy covenant with hell".¹² "A ruinous house, the longer thou lettest it run, the more labour and change will it require in repairing. If thou drive a nail with a hammer, the more blows thou givest to it, the more hard it will be to pluck it out again. It is just so in the case of continuing in sin; and every new sin is a stroke with the hammer."¹³

3. DIFFERENT CASES FOR COUNSELLING CONSIDERED

Richard Sibbes in his 'Souls Conflict', John Durant¹⁴ in his 'Comfort and Counsel for Dejected Souls' and William Bridge¹⁵ in his 'Lifting up for the Downcast' all used Psalm 42:11, "Why art thou cast down O my soul," as a springboard for a series of sermons on counsel for troubled souls.

Causes of spiritual trouble according to Durant and Bridge read as follows:

John Durant: causes of trouble: William Bridge: causes of trouble:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. Remainders of Corruption | 1. Great Sins |
| 2. Falls into Sin | 2. Weak grace |
| 3. Ignorance of the Covenant of Grace | 3. Miscarriage of duties |
| 4. Spiritual indisposition to duties | 4. Lack of assurance |
| 5. Want of former incomes (spiritual decline) | 5. Temptation |
| 6. Insulting of Satan, and Enemies | 6. Desertion |
| 7. Some corporal affliction | 7. Affliction |
| 8. Appearance of Divine wrath | 8. Unserviceableness |

It is worthy of note that all these troubles are with us today. They are all relevant. Each particular area deserves thorough

treatment. If we are to be the physicians of the soul then we must not gloss over the problems but analyse them with prayerfulness and sympathy.

Much though I would like to deal with all the subjects outlined above, bringing each into its equivalent contemporary setting, it is possible to handle five only. These are the ones most frequently before us as pastors. They are Assurance, Desertion, Falling into Sin, Afflictions and Temptations.

1 ASSURANCE

This subject is highly relevant today and the problem widespread largely because of decisionism. Large numbers are assured that they are Christians because they have registered a decision. When complaint is made that no change has been felt or experienced the troubled soul is counselled to ignore his feelings and just believe. In many, perhaps most instances, disillusionment follows and the person simply falls away from any profession of faith. Sometimes their condition then is worse than before as scepticism sets in, followed by hardness of heart. On the other hand, there are those who, despite difficulties, persevere in the means of grace and come to experience the new birth as they continue under the ministry of the Word, obtaining a well grounded assurance of salvation.

Apart from assurance problems arising out of contemporary evangelistic methods, it is hard to find any church where there are not some who struggle through lack of assurance and who struggle on this account, some more so than others. The Puritans were experts on the subject, two treatises are fairly well known today, both established by the Banner of Truth, namely, 'The Christian's Great Interest' by William Guthrie, and 'Heaven on Earth' by Thomas Brooks.

Brooks' counsel to believers as to ways and means of gaining a well-grounded assurance is as follows: 1. Be active in exercising grace. 2. Follow the path of obedience. 3. Follow diligently the instructions of the Holy Spirit. 4. Be diligent in attendance upon ordinances. 5. Pay particular attention to the scope of God's promises of mercy. 6. Distinguish those matters in which believers are different from all others. 7. Seek to grow in grace. 8. Seek

assurance when the soul is in its best frames. 9. Ascertain whether you have the things which accompany salvation: knowledge, faith, repentance, obedience, love, prayer, perseverance and hope. Each one of the latter: knowledge, faith, etc., is then made the subject of a detailed chapter.

It is possible to lose assurance and suffer much conflict of soul as a result. Brooks suggests six methods whereby souls which have lost assurance may be kept from fainting, and offers five suggestions whereby they may recover it. One support of the person exercised by lost assurance is to remember that eternal happiness does not depend upon assurance and another is that though assurance may be lost "blessed breathings and sweet influences of the spirit upon them" are not lost. "Witness", he says, "their love to Christ, their longing after Christ, their fear of offending Christ, their care to please Christ".¹⁶ While I agree with Brooks in most of his exposition I do not follow him in the idea that God removes assurance. We should always think in terms of God giving assurance and not confuse loss of assurance with desertion to which we now give our attention.

2. DESERTION

We know from Heb.13:5 that God will never forsake his people but this is not to be confused with the hiding of his face. There can be very gloomy days when the sun is hidden, but we do not thereby conclude that it has ceased to exist. The child cries as if her mother was gone, when she is but hidden, or attending to duties. "Zion said, the Lord has forsaken me, and my God has forgotten me" (Is.49:14,15).

Manton distinguishes between temporary or partial desertion and eternal or total desertion of reprobates such as Saul and Esau. Concerning temporary desertion he makes further distinctions between internal and external desertion and, also, desertion in regard to comfort or grace.¹⁷ When David says, "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me" he is referring to the withdrawing of the Spirit, that is to internal desertion. External desertion is when God leaves us under heavy crosses.

In counselling deserted souls comfort can be administered by explaining the wisdom of God's purpose in such situations. While we

cannot know the mind of God in each case we do know examples from Scripture to show that he has wise reasons for dealing in this particular way with his people. "Wherefore hidest thou thy face", cried Job, "and holdest me for thine enemy?" "Thou makest me possess the iniquities of my youth" (Job 13:24,26).

What are the reasons for desertion? Manton summarizes as follows:

1. To correct us for our wantonness, and our unkind dealing with Christ.
2. To acquaint us with our weakness.
3. To subdue our carnal confidence.
4. To heighten our esteem of Christ, that love may be sharpened by absence.
5. That by our own bitter experience we may learn how to value the suffering of Christ.
6. To prevent evil to come, especially pride, that we might not be lifted up; and to entender our hearts to others (2 Cor.1:4).¹⁸

Pastors ought to be equipped to deal with cases of desertion. This affliction is a reality. It is, says Bridge, as "the darkening of the sun, which brings a universal darkness upon the soul"¹⁹ and Sibbes quoting Luther declares: "If all the temptations of the whole world and hell itself were mustered together, they were nothing to this, whereby the great God sets himself contrary to his poor creature".²⁰

3. FALLS INTO SIN - THE FEAR OF THE UNPARDONABLE SIN, OF BEING AN ESAU.

Having considered the questions of assurance and desertion as causes of spiritual conflict let us look more closely at other sources of trouble pinpointed by Puritan writers. Those who fall into sin after conversion, once brought to repentance, are prone to the temptation to believe that they have committed the unpardonable sin. Deep sorrow for sin and self abhorrence are quite consistent with Gospel justification (Zech.12:10; Ez.36:31; Is.57:15), but if grief only prevails a soul may dishonour the Gospel. Constant depression and gloom will not only harm the one concerned but hinder and distract his family and the Church. Not only those like King David who have committed great sins, but some who have very tender consciences and who lack assurance are prone to

affliction on account of shadows cast upon their standing before God because of sin.

John Owen, in expounding Ps.130:4 "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared", proposes some valuable advice to those afflicted with falls into sin and the problem of forgiveness.²¹ "Mix not foundation and building work together" he counsels. Justification by faith is the foundation and all else proceeds from this foundation. Great entanglements ensue if there is not clarity on this matter. Owen further advises against useless complainings and bemoaning of the soul's condition. "Get you up," said God to Joshua and the elders, "why lie you thus upon your faces?" (Joshua 7:10). "If you would come to stability" continues Owen "Improve the least appearances of God unto your soul, and the least imitations of his love in pardon". Even when the spouse can only enjoy a glimpse of her husband at the lattice she rejoices in him (Song.2:9).

The Puritans linked Heb.6:4-6 and 10:25-29 with our Lord's teaching on the unpardonable sin. This is germane at this point because pastors frequently find souls afflicted with the torment of seeing themselves beyond redemption on account of sin against the Holy Spirit. William Guthrie disposes of the difficulty by providing a very clear exposition of what this sin is and what it is not.²² For comfort one of his conclusions reads as follows, "Whatsoever thou hast done against God, if thou dost repent of it, and wish it were undone, thou canst not be guilty of this sin." He then points out that heart malice against God and spite against God prevail as part of the unpardonable state.

Common in pastoral experience are cases where troubled souls are tempted to think that their position approximates to that of Saul, Balaam, Judas or Esau. Did not Esau seek repentance carefully with tears? (Heb.12:17) But he was rejected! One of the most passionate reasonings to counsel and comfort afflicted souls in doubt about their standing is found in Bridge's works. "Did you ever know a man finally forsaken of Christ, who longed after the presence of Christ as the greatest good, and looked upon his absence as the greatest evil and affliction in all the world, being willing to kiss the feet of Jesus Christ, and to serve him in the lowest and meanest condition, so he might but enjoy him? Did you ever read in all the Word of God, that ever a man was finally forsaken who

was tender in the point of sin, who sat mourning after God?"²³

To this challenge the simple reply might be given, Esau! What about Esau? Probably John Owen's greatest work is his massive exposition on the Hebrew epistle and certainly we have not discovered any other commentary on that epistle as thorough or as satisfying as the one by the prince of the Puritans. In his exposition he draws attention to the following important facts concerning Esau: 1. He afterward sought. This afterward was about 40 or 50 years. 2. The blessing sought was the birthright not salvation. 3. In his attempt he was rejected. Eternal reprobation is not hereby intended. For that we turn to Rom.9:11,12. The refusal of his father to give him the patriarchal blessing is intended. 4. "He sought it diligently with tears" but there is nothing in the words which should in the least intimate that he sought of God the grace of repentance. 5. Gen.27:38 refers to Esau's weeping and due consideration must be given to the conflict connected with the peculiar relationship between Isaac and Esau.²⁴ Painstaking exposition of the Word may be necessary in order to remove false fears in afflicted souls and we ought not to shun the labour required in order to bring troubled spirits to peace in Christ.

4. AFFLICTIONS OR TRIBULATIONS

Hezekiah was cast into the depths of depression through physical sickness (Is.38:3), and David through bereavement (2 Sam.18:33). Spiritual drought cast down Habakkuk although he learned to sing the songs of Zion in his affliction (Hab.3:17). Lamentable failure in denying his Lord caused Peter to weep bitterly (Matt.26:75).

In analysing and giving counsel to souls in distress great wisdom, insight, discretion and tenderness are needed. Richard Sibbes who was known in London during the early seventeenth century as 'The Heavenly Doctor Sibbes' can afford elders more help than most others in advising them as to what should be remembered when counselling those in tribulation.

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones describes a time in his life when he was badly overtired and subject in an unusual way to the onslaughts of the devil. At that time when he needed gentle tender treatment for his soul he found soothing, quietness, comfort, encouragement and healing through Sibbes' works, particularly 'The Bruised Reed'

and 'The Soul's Conflict'.²⁵ The minister who cannot help others is ill-suited to his vocation and the elder who does not know the appropriate remedy to apply to himself in the various spiritual perplexities and conflicts through which he must inevitably pass is to be pitied.

Some leading principles summarised from Sibbes' writings will be of help to us in our study. Christ will not break the bruised reed and will not quench the smoking flax (Matt.12:20). There must ever be an eye to preserve the flame of faith. In times of anguish Satan will attempt to extinguish it. "For the great consolation of poor and weak Christians," says Sibbes, "let them know, that a spark from heaven, though kindled under greenwood that is soggy, yet it will consume all at last"²⁶ The counsellor comforting those in tribulation ought to discern the relationship of the affliction to the work of sanctification. In a sermon, 'The Discreet Ploughman', Sibbes expounds Is.28:23-29. That portion of Scripture draws attention to the fact that in the threshing of wheat, barley or rye, different instruments and methods are used and various pressures applied to separate the kernals from the chaff. Likewise God's dealings with his people are precisely and exactly determined by the wise end in view.

Much comfort is afforded in stressing that nothing occurs which is not designed for the good of God's children. All things work together for their good (Rom.8:28).

Thomas Watson in his matchless book on Rom.8:28 shows that the worst things work for good to the godly including the evils of affliction, temptation, desertion and sin.

It is of comfort to the saints to think that there is a divine purpose in their afflictions. One main reason for affliction is the furtherance of sanctification. "Water in the glass looks clear, but set it on the fire", says Watson, "and the scum boils up - much impatience and unbelief appear". "Oh", says the Christian, "I never thought my corruptions had been so strong, and my graces so weak."²⁷

Stephen Charnock in his exposition on Providence explains that "it is not bad with the righteous however afflicted. No righteous man would, in his right mind, be willing to make an exchange of his smartest affliction", asserts Charnock, "for a wicked man's pros-

perity. Is it not more desirable to be upon a dunghill with an intimate converse with God, than upon a throne without it?" ²⁸

In exposition of Psalm 119:25, "my soul cleaveth to the dust", Thomas Manton specifies reasons for the saint's affliction as follows. 1. To correct them for their past sins. 2. To humble them, and bring them low down even to the dust (2 Cor.1:7-9) that they build not too securely on their own sufficiencies. 3. To try their graces. 4. To awaken the spirit of prayer (Ps.130:1). 5. To show the more of his glory, and the riches of his goodness in their recovery (Ps.71:20,21). ²⁹

Tribulation is not easy to bear and much counsel is often needed to comfort the afflicted. Some afflictions are of a temporary nature in which case it is permissible to provide comfort with truth expressed in Psalm 34:19. "Many are the troubles of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of all". Henry Smith in a sermon on this text points out that "the lawyer can deliver his client from strife; the physician can deliver his patient from sickness; the master his servant from bondage; but the Lord delivereth out of all." God does provide means of deliverance and it is right that we should pray for these to be effective but it depends entirely upon the Lord. ³⁰

Several portions of Scripture can be consulted to remind the afflicted soul that there is an end of trial. "After two days he will revive us, and the third day he will raise us up" (Hos.6:2). "Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy will come in the morning" (Ps.30:5).

Yet for some there may be no deliverance. Their sickness may be terminal in which case we are required to prepare them for the final deliverance. Again I quote words of comfort for those in this state from Smith: "Seeing then your kingdom is not here, look not for a golden life in an iron world; but remember that Lazarus doth not mourn in heaven, though he suffered pains on earth (Luke 16), but the glutton mourneth in hell, that stayed not for the pleasures of heaven. To which pleasures the Lord Jesus brings us, when this cloud of trouble is blown over us!" ³¹

Probably the sweetest of all comfort for souls in affliction is the certain knowledge that their trials are designed by a Father's

love. "The greatest and bitterest sufferings", declares Thomas Goodwin, "be sweetened to us, looked upon as coming from a father. It was so with Christ; when he looks upon this as a cup given him by his Father, and it is a pleasure to him to drink it off (John 4:34). Whatsoever cup it be that God in thy life affords thee, take it, and go drink it off heartily; for whether thou wilt or no, if it be a cup he hath given thee, thou shalt drink it."³²

Our Lord sweated as it were great drops of blood in Gethsemane in anticipation of his sufferings which were substitutionary and propitiatory. "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." (Phil.1:29) Human nature shrinks as did Christ's human nature from that which has only come into the world because of sin. Some who may have suffered already cannot endure the thought of more. It is right to pray for relief as did David (Ps.39:10) "Remove thy stroke away from me." When more sorrow comes then the added burden of temptation comes too, the temptation to censure God.

Several reasons are proposed by John Flavel to counter this temptation and crush it. He shows the foolishness of exalting our own reason and understanding above the infinite wisdom of God as well as the folly of spurning God's sovereignty. Furthermore to fret and to quarrel is not only like clay chiding the potter but is destructive to our inward peace and tranquility of mind. Our murmuring reveals odious ingratitude toward God.³³

5. TEMPTATION

As we have just noted, affliction can bring temptation with it. This subject brings us to consider the whole world of spiritual warfare in which all God's people are involved.

Let John Gibbon speak for the others when he declares, "be well skilled in the wiles of temptation - I mean, in unmasking sophistry and mystery of iniquity, in detecting and frustrating the cheats and finesses of the flesh with its deceitful lusts - if ever thou wouldest prove famous and victorious, and worthy of honour and reverence in thy spiritual warfare, be well seen in the skill of fencing, know all thy wards for every attack".³⁴

Not only the world and the flesh but Satan, who is able to

manipulate both in temptation, has to be dealt with in all his wiles and strategies. According to William Bridge, "the evil one, for his devouring nature is called a lion, for his cruelty is called a dragon, and for his subtlety an old serpent: and in every temptation a poor soul goes into the field with Satan, and fights a duel with him".³⁵

Thomas Brooks', 'Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices', is rightly regarded as the classic work on the subject and not surprisingly occupies premier position in the first volume of a six volume set of his works.³⁶ Innumerable devices are exposed and remedies suggested as well as wise counsel given. One example must suffice.

There are those who become extremely depressed because of relapses into sin. Satan endeavours to bring them to despair on this account. Brooks cites several characters from Scripture to show that even the choicest saints have struggled to overcome besetting sins but, lest any think that excuses can be made on this account, he brings his readers to consider that relapses into enormities are different from relapses into infirmities.

Richard Gilpin's treatise on this subject is much more detailed than that of Brooks and is a great help in that he handles matters of the utmost relevance today.³⁷ We hear, for instance, of those who have forsaken the evangelical faith. Having been captivated by liberal theological concepts they have ultimately come to oppose all that they previously advocated as essential for salvation. Gilpin shows how Satan can divert a man's thoughts and pervert his reason illustrating too, that corrupt principles invariably lead to corrupt practices.

William Gurnall's massive one thousand one hundred and fifty page, double-column exposition of Ephesians 6:10-18 provides all necessary directions for a right use of our spiritual weapons as well as counsel for those tempted or assailed by the devil.³⁸ Note a little of Gurnall's advice on "fiery darts of the wicked" as he counsels those tempted with the sin of despair. "The soul should view the great God - the infinitude of all his attributes, particularly his justice which Christ has satisfied. The scarlet thread on Rahab's window kept the destroying sword out of her house; and the blood of Christ, pleaded by faith, will keep the soul from

receiving any hurt at the hands of divine justice. The soul should draw encouragement from the cloud of witnesses. O who can read of a Manasseh, a Magdalene, a Paul - in the roll of pardoned sinners, and yet turn away from the promises?" He concludes by showing that despair opposes God in the greatest of his commands, which is to believe, and at the same time it strengthens and enrages all other sins in the soul.

CONCLUSIONS

We have seen that the Puritans were always mindful of a person's standing before God. This to them was fundamental. As Thomas Goodwin shows, there is the case to be considered of a child of light walking in darkness but also the case of a child of darkness walking in light.³⁹

The two must never be confused. Likewise Thomas Brooks demonstrates that it is the chief wile of the devil to persuade people that repentance is easy.⁴⁰ Particularly in our day when superficial views of repentance are rampant we ought to be discerning as to whether the one afflicted has both faith and repentance. Both are essential.

We have also observed that a wide variety of causes lead to distress. Some of the main causes of soul trouble have received the briefest attention but sources of detailed exposition have been referred to with comments in the appendices. An important conclusion from this study is the fact that republication of Puritan works is by no means complete. Valuable treasures await the publisher's attention. New editions of rare works such as Brooks' 'Heaven on Earth' are urgently needed. Once Christians realise the expository value of these treatises they will turn from facile books with repugnance. A man having drunk old wine will not desire for new for, says he, "the old is better".

Several examples could be quoted of Puritan books on counselling that urgently require republication. Joseph Symonds' 'The Case and Cure of a Deserted Soul' 1641 (558 small pages) is an example of the purest gold for expository value. A last quotation from the Puritans in this paper is from Symonds and is designed to be of help to all Christians whatever their condition. Affirms Symonds of the things to be done by the regenerate: 1. Stir up yourselves

and work upon your hearts by your understanding. 2. Attend the ordinances. 3. Take the help of saints. 4. Do your first works.
41 How do we stir up our hearts by our understanding? Symonds gives seven most helpful practical suggestions but we may not have them now.

Only one important matter remains and that is the necessity to discern carefully between those who are severely cast down yet able still to care for themselves and those who for any reason whatever have lost possession or control of their actions and who need continual care or oversight. Prompt responsible provision has to be sought in such instances.

Acute abnormal depression or melancholia can be a reason why distressed souls attempt in some cases to take their own lives.

A.A.Alexander in his 'Thoughts on Religious Experience' gives advice which is as helpful today as it was when he wrote it during the last century. Among his counsels he advises that tender compassion is needed and that harsh language should never be used in the case of the disease of melancholy.⁴² Counsel which it is beyond the power of such people to receive and apply should not be given and nor does it help to say to them that their woes are imagined, not real. Nor does it help them to assert that their disease is to be attributed to the devil. Accounts of disaster or calamities should be avoided as those in this condition only tend to apply everything to themselves in the most adverse way. The prayers of God's people for deliverance are to be sought and encouragement drawn from passages of Scripture showing the mercy and power of God.

In addition to those we already have who require biblical counsel we need to be prepared for spiritual awakening. Were our prayers for revival to be answered we would surely find many who have presumed themselves to be safe, awakened to their lost state. The need for discerning counsel would be much increased.

NOTES

1. 'Competent to Counsel' (1970) and 'The Big Umbrella' (1972) (see p.132ff) Both are published by Pres.& Ref. Both books are reviewed and discussed in detail in 'Reformation Today' issue 15.
2. See 'Christian Counselling' G.Brillenbug Wurth. Pres.& Ref. 1962.
3. Freud pre-supposed sex and conscience as the basic issues. His approach was contrary to the biblical one at almost every point. Carl Rogers is responsible for a system of counselling, very widespread in which man is regarded as autonomous.
4. 'Instructions for a right comforting of Afflicted Consciences with special antidotes against some grievous temptation' (1631) Robert Bolton. This is an exceedingly valuable and rare book. Robert Bolton 1572-1631 was before his conversion a Roman Catholic lecturer in logic, moral and natural philosophy. He was the minister at Broughton in Northamptonshire.
5. ibid. p.58
6. Francesco Spira born in Italy about 1498 denied his Protestant profession and died in a state of intense despair and remorse in 1548. The details of his life were widely known and made a profound impression. Calvin and the other reformers took a deep interest in his case and did not regard him as having experienced true repentance even though he preached justification by faith to others before he denied the truth by going back within the Roman fold.
7. 'Comforting of Afflicted Consciences' Robert Bolton p.136 Bolton acknowledges that he is following Augustine and Chrysostom in their expositions at this point.
8. 'The Whole Armour of God' p.237,238
9. 'Treatise of Faith' p.149
10. c.f. 'Becoming a Christian' Westminster Conference Papers 1972 p.61 following.

11. *ibid.* Bolton p.250 ff
12. *ibid.* p.151 ff
13. *ibid.* p.246
14. Published in 1651 but to the best of my knowledge never reprinted. John Durant (a.1660) was a lesser known Puritan. He ministered at Canterbury. To one of his books he gave the quaint title 'A cluster of grapes taken out of the basket of the woman at Canaan'.
15. Thirteen sermons preached at Stepney, London, in the year 1648 Bridge's works were reprinted in five volumes in the last century. The Banner of Truth reprinted 'A lifting up for the Downcast' in 1961. It is now out of print. Bridge (b⁺1600 d⁺1670) of Norwich who was one of the Westminster divines fled to Holland in 1636 where he associated with Jeremiah Burroughs. He returned to England in 1642.
16. 'Heaven on Earth' Thomas Brooks. Banner of Truth edition p.313 ff
17. 'Manton's Complete Works' Vol.6 p.77 ff
18. *ibid.* p.80
19. 'A Lifting up for the Downcast' William Bridge. Banner of Truth p.173
20. 'Sibbes Works' Vol.1 p.227
21. 'The Works of John Owen' Vol.6 p.564 ff
22. 'The Christian's Great Interest' William Guthrie. Banner of Truth p.154 ff. A present day author who follows the same argument with the greatest clarity and helpfulness is Edwin H.Palmer. 'The Holy Spirit' Pres.& Ref. p.165 ff
23. *op cit* 'A Lifting up' p.184 ff
24. 'An Exposition of Hebrews' John Owen Vol.4 p.302-3
- 26.

25. 'Preaching and Preachers' D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Hodder and Stoughton 1971.
26. 'Sibbes' Works' Vol.1 p.86
27. This volume of about 94 pages has been reprinted several times with the title 'A Divine Cordial' Evangelical Press. Thomas Watson was one of the most popular preachers of his time. Persecuted after his ejection in 1662 he nevertheless continued to preach, at one time pastoring a flock together with Stephen Charnock. He died in 1686. His famous 'Body of Divinity' being an exposition of the Shorter Catechism is one of the Banner of Truth's best sellers and is an ideal introduction to both Puritan theology and Puritan writings as a whole. In the writer's view Watson and Brooks are the most scintillating to read, Manton (22 volumes in all) the most useful. Sibbes the best for themes of comfort and tenderness and Owen the most penetrating; these comments not in any way to disparage a host of others.
28. 'Charnock's Works' (1815 edition) Vol.3 p.549
29. 'Manton's Works' Vol.6 p.236
30. 'The Works of Henry Smith' Vol.1 p.245. Henry Smith (1560-1591) was commonly called the silver-tongued preacher that was but one metal below St.Chrysostom himself. Both high and low flocked to hear him, the aisles being filled with standing hearers.
31. *ibid.* p.247
32. 'Works of Thomas Goodwin' Vol.5 p.223
33. 'Works of John Flavel' Vol.6 p.133 ff
34. 'Morning Exercises. Cripplegate' Sermon on Gal.5:16 with title "How may we be so spiritual, as to check sin in the risings of it?"
35. 'A Lifting up for the Downcast' p.152

36. 'Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices' Banner of Truth paper-back edition. Pastors should encourage the publishers to keep these Puritan troubled souls, they are of immense value.
37. 'A Treatise of Satan's Temptations' Richard Gilpin. The third and final section is an exposition of Christ's temptation and runs to 160 pages. Revival of interest in witchcraft today makes Gilpin's section on this subject in his book apposite.
38. 'The Christian in Complete Armour' William Gurnall. Banner of Truth. This book is a photo reproduction of a former edition published in two volumes in 1864.
39. 'Works of Thomas Goodwin' Vol.3 p.236 ff
40. 'Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices' p.55 ff
41. 'The Case and Cure of a Deserted Soul' Joseph Symonds p.379 ff
42. 'Thoughts on Religious Experience' A.A.Alexander p.36 ff Banner of Truth.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE GOSPEL AMONGST 'HYPER-CALVINISTS'

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There is as much variation in the understanding of the Gospel and its presentation among hyper-calvinists as among any other comparable theological tradition. Some preachers do not address the unconverted at all.¹ Others address them but in a particular way that guards the preacher from implying natural, creature ability to do spiritual acts.

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