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THE GROWTH OF A SUPRALAPSARIAN CHRISTOLOGY

by PETER TOON

MR. TOON, Divinity Master in Thorne Grammar School, Yorkshire, has for some time made a special study of English Calvinism in the Augustan Age, and we are happy to present the following by-product of this study. Its relevance to those areas of present-day Reformed life and thought in which the free offer of the gospel tends, time and again, to become a live issue, will not be lost upon some of our readers.

ALTHOUGH the late Dr. B. B. Warfield¹ did not believe that there were any fundamental differences between the theology of Calvin and that of the orthodox Puritans, modern scholars² have sought to demonstrate that Calvinist theologians did, after Calvin's death, change the emphasis of, and add to, original Calvinism. Apart from the possible damaging effects of controversy with Roman Catholic and Arminian adversaries, and the use of scholastic methods,³ Ramist logic⁴ has been seen as having made much seventeenth-century theology arid and over-methodical. Alexander Richardson of Queens' and William Ames of Christ's, Cambridge, expanded and interpreted Ramist logic and method to provide Puritans with the important doctrine of *technologia*. "The foundation of *technologia* was clearly the doctrine that in the mind of God there exists a coherent and rational scheme of ideas upon which He modelled the world. . . . As the similitude of a house must exist in the mind of an architect before its construction, so in the mind of any artificer, God or man, there must be a set of exemplars prefiguring the structure and directing the work."⁵ The famous Independent minister, Thomas Goodwin, a graduate of Christ's College, absorbed this teaching (as well as the covenant theology taught by Ames, Preston, Ball and Sibbes) and later made use of it in his explanation of an important section of Christology. This

¹ B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia, 1956), pp. 207ff.

² E.g. Basil Hall in *John Calvin* (ed. G. E. Duffield, 1966), chaps. 1 and 2.

³ Cf. O. Grundier, "Thomism and Calvinism in the theology of Girolamo Zanchi", unpublished thesis, Princeton, 1961.

⁴ Cf. W. J. Ong, *Ramus, Method and Decay of Dialogue* (Harvard U.P., 1958).

⁵ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind, The Seventeenth-Century* (Harv. U.P., 1954), p. 166. In ch. 6 he gives a good account of *technologia*.

essay seeks first to describe Goodwin's "God-man" Christology and secondly to show how it was developed by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Calvinists.

Goodwin loved to dwell on the perfection of the manhood of Jesus Christ and therefore he delighted to speak of Christ as the "God-man" or simply as "The Man". In Part III of *The Knowledge of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ*, entitled, "Of the glories and royalties that belong unto Jesus Christ", he discusses the position of the Second Person of the Trinity in heaven before the creation of the universe. He carefully examines Colossians 1: 15-19; Proverbs 8: 22-29; John 17: 5, all of which make reference, he believes, to the Second Person as He existed before creation and from the agreement of the covenant of redemption (which he views as having taken place at a fixed point in eternity). By virtue of the divine decree within the covenant that the Second Person should become Man, Goodwin believes that these verses describe Him as existing in the mind of God as an archetype, a real pre-existent idea. Christ "was set up from everlasting from the beginning"; when God "marked out the foundations of the earth" Christ, the God-man, was by Him. He was "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature" as he existed in God's mind. As God-man he had a special glory reckoned to him by the Father. "The Son of God was extant and with God at the instant when He was chosen to this glory of being God-man; . . . the glory of it was immediately given to him at the very instant of that act of predestinating him to it."⁶ He believes that the creation of man was based by God on the great Exemplar, the God-man. Indeed, not only was Adam formed in the image of the God-man, but his marriage to Eve was a type of the union of the elect with Christ already ratified in heaven. The elect "were given meet companions, children, spouses unto him (who was) already ordained, and set up as God-man, to be an everlasting father, and by like reason, an everlasting husband to them".⁷

It must be emphasized that Goodwin never states that Christ's human nature existed in heaven. As Goodwin himself puts it, "Whatever God predestinates, persons, or things concerning persons, He hath the idea thereof, and all that appertains thereto in His divine mind."⁸ This type of thinking, based on the Ramist

⁶ In *Works* (ed. J. C. Miller, Edin., 1862), vol. iv, p. 490.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 503.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 488. Though Goodwin makes use of references to Christ as the God-man in the writings of Augustine, Calvin and Bodius, this precise formulation of the doctrine is his own.

doctrine of *technologìa*, emphasizes the divine decrees of God, and makes use of covenant theology, to an extent not found in the writings of John Calvin, and becomes a dangerous mode of thought in the hands of less intelligent men.

In the early years of the eighteenth century, when Arianism and Socinianism were widely diffused in England, at least two men found a refuge in Goodwin's doctrine. They were Joseph Hussey and Isaac Watts. Ordained as a Presbyterian in 1688, Hussey⁹ became a Congregationalist at Cambridge in 1693. After a critical period of self-examination and extensive reading he published in 1706, *The Glory of Christ Unveil'd*. Its 1,000 pages were written in answer to a book by John Hunt entitled *The Saints Treasury* (1704), and as a platform to propagate the discoveries he had made in the doctrines of the gospel. Though he claims that his Christology is drawn from the Bible, it is obvious that Goodwin's work is the basis of it, since he uses the same Bible verses and develops the same ideas from them. Furthermore he speaks highly of Goodwin in the preface. Yet in two important respects he differs from Goodwin. First, he reads at times as though he believed that Christ's human nature did mysteriously exist in heaven before creation. "If Christ had not stood thus in the love of God, as the *Man* from everlasting, and the Church from everlasting with Him, to what purpose had the Old Testament styled Him actually 'The Man' (Zech. 1: 19)? And relatively, as the 'Husband' (Isa. 54: 5) and 'Bridegroom' to His Spouse describ'd Him so long before He was the 'Open Man'? If He was not actually with God, the 'Secret Man', the 'Covenant Man', in these times of the Old Testament why was it so spoken in the Old Testament?"¹⁰ Secondly he gives great prominence to supralapsarianism, which Goodwin does not; he often speaks of "the supra-lapsarian glory of the Wisdom-man". On the basis of this supralapsarianism he proceeds to draw the conclusion that there is no Biblical justification for offering Christ in preaching to all men. He expounds this thesis in great detail in *God's Operations of Grace but No Offers of Grace* (1707). This book influenced the growth of hyper-Calvinism amongst Congregationalists and

⁹ For Hussey's ministry in Cambridge, see the pamphlet by A. G. Matthews, *Diary of a Cambridge Minister*, 1937; for his theology see P. Toon, "Joseph Hussey, Architect of Hyper-Calvinism", *Free Grace Record*, Jan. 1967.

¹⁰ *The Glory of Christ*, p. 184.

Particular Baptists.¹¹ It advocates a doctrine that Goodwin would have abhorred.

Isaac Watts, the hymn-writer and educationalist, also adopted Goodwin's God-man Christology. It first appeared in *Four Dissertations relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity* (1725), but was presented systematically in *The Glory of Christ as God-Man Displayed* (1746). Discourse III of this latter book contains "An argument tracing out the early existence of the human soul of Christ even before the creation of the world". This is followed by an appendix containing an abridgement of the book of Goodwin already studied. Writing in the preface, Watts tells the reader, "I must acknowledge, indeed, that I have endeavoured to carry on the hints I have met with in some great and honoured writers to further length, and to trace the golden thread of these discoveries through far distant scenes and ages by the light of both reason and Scripture". The honoured writers include, apart from Goodwin, such men as the Cambridge Platonist Henry More,¹² Bishop Edward Fowler,¹³ and the Presbyterian Robert Fleming.¹⁴ Through reading these men's books, Watts severely modified Goodwin's doctrine and advocated the pre-existence of the human soul of Christ.¹⁵ This doctrine Goodwin would certainly have opposed.

Another man who learned the neo-platonic doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul of Christ from the same sources as Watts (indeed the views of Watts may also have influenced him) was Samuel Stockell, minister of the Red Cross Street Independent Church from 1728 to 1750. Unlike Watts, who was a moderate Calvinist, Stockell was a "very high Calvinist" who had "drank deep into the sentiments of Crisp".¹⁶ He had learned the basis of his theology listening to Joseph Hussey when the latter was minister of the Petticoat Lane Independent Church, 1719 to 1726. Although Stockell, in *The Redeemers Glory Unveil'd* (1733), echoes the main essentials of Hussey's supralapsarianism and God-man Christology, he diverges from him in two important points. He teaches that the soul of Christ was created by God in eternity and joined

¹¹ Cf. Dr. G. F. Nuttall, "Northamptonshire and 'The Modern Question'", *Journ. Theol. Studies*, N.S., xvi, pt. 1 (1965), and P. Toon, "John Brine", *Free Grace Record*, Oct. 1965.

¹² Henry More, *Magni Mysterii Pietatis* (in *Opera Theologica*, 1675).

¹³ Edward Fowler, *A Discourse of the Descent of the Man-Christ Jesus* (1706).

¹⁴ Robert Fleming, *Christology*, vol. iii, 1708.

¹⁵ Cf. A. P. Davis, *Isaac Watts* (1948), p. 118.

¹⁶ W. Wilson, *History of ... Dissenting Churches ... in London* (1810), vol. iii, p. 311.

to the Second Person to form the God-man, who then made the covenant of redemption with the Father; and also he teaches that the Second Person should only be called the "Son of God" from the time when he covenanted to become man.¹⁷ These erroneous opinions gained so much favour amongst the Particular Baptists that John Brine,¹⁸ and later Andrew Fuller,¹⁹ felt obliged to attack them. At the beginning of the nineteenth-century, the doctrines of Stockell were still held "in great repute amongst persons of the same school with the author"²⁰ and a second edition of his book was printed. In John Stevens, Baptist minister of Salem Chapel, Soho, Stockell's views found a zealous advocate. He wrote at least five books²¹ to advocate the doctrine of the pre-existent soul of Christ and when these were attacked by W. H. Colyer²² of Farningham, Thomas Blonfield,²³ an Independent minister, and J. A. Jones,²⁴ a Baptist minister, wrote in their defence.

The popularity of the supralapsarian God-man Christology amongst hyper-Calvinists is further seen in the fact that Hussey's *Glory of Christ* was reprinted in 1761, 1790 and 1846. Also, edited portions of it were produced by J. A. Babb in *The Glory of Christ and the Church* (1844) and S. E. Pierce in *The Riches of Divine Grace* (1822). Pierce himself wrote several books which advocated Hussey's doctrine. A close friend of Pierce was Dr. Robert Hawker, an Anglican minister, who wrote prefaces for some of Pierce's books. He also shared the enthusiasm for the doctrines of Goodwin and Hussey and brought out in 1818 an edition of Goodwin's *The Glories of Christ set forth in his mediatorial character* (first edition 1651) and, in 1838, *The Life of Dr. Thomas Goodwin*. It is interesting to note that he opposed Stevens' doctrine of the pre-existence

¹⁷ It is possible that he was influenced in this particular by the writings of John Hutchinson (1674-1737), whose followers were called Hutchinsonians. There is a need for a monograph dealing with these men and their beliefs about Christ as the Son of God, whom they viewed as Son by office and not by eternal generation.

¹⁸ John Brine, *The Proper Eternity of the Divine Decrees* (1754), p. 3.

¹⁹ Andrew Fuller, *Works* (1845 ed.), vol. i, pp. xxvi-xxviii.

²⁰ W. Wilson, *op. cit.*, vol. iii, p. 311.

²¹ The first was J. Stevens, *A Scriptural Display of the Triune God and the early existence of Jesus' human soul* (1813).

²² E.g., in W. H. Colyer, *Reasons for rejecting the Hypothesis of the Human Soul of Christ* (London, 1835).

²³ Thomas Blonfield, *Truth Vindicated in reply to ... W. H. Colyer* (London, 1835).

²⁴ J. A. Jones, *Unwelcome Discoveries ... and sad mistakes of W. H. Colyer* (London, 1835).

of the human soul of Christ in two published letters addressed to John Stevens in 1818.

The joint effect of all these publications, especially those by John Stevens, was to produce much uneasiness amongst hyper-Calvinists in the first half of the nineteenth-century over the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son of God.²⁵ No group felt the effect more than the Strict and Particular Baptists.²⁶ These Baptists, who believed in strict communion and particular redemption, had refused to join the (now) Baptist Union and were not well organized. In two of their magazines, *The Gospel Herald* and *The Earthen Vessel*, there appeared after 1833 short articles and editorials which supported the views of Stevens. The appearance of these came as a challenge to John Gadsby, son of the preacher William Gadsby, and he began another Strict Baptist monthly magazine, *The Gospel Standard*. One of the editors of this magazine was J. C. Philpot, who had resigned his Fellowship at Worcester College, Oxford, and he strenuously advocated the orthodox doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son of God and denied the pre-existence of the human soul. For twenty years the controversy continued in these magazines and from the pulpits of Strict Baptist chapels. The scars caused by this controversy remain to this day. Those churches which supported *The Gospel Standard* magazine are now a separate group within the Strict and Particular Baptist denomination. The Trust Deeds of some Strict Baptist chapels still have words within them which require that no minister is to be appointed who denies the doctrine of eternal generation. At the top of the Chapel Directory in *The Christian's Pathway* (another Strict Baptist magazine begun in 1896) the following words appear: "This Directory is for the use of . . . Ministers holding . . . the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ in His Divine Nature." Finally, some Strict Baptist ministers are still, it would seem, trying to show their adherence to orthodox doctrine; this is seen in the recent printing of papers on the subject of the eternal Sonship and kindred doctrines by members of a Strict Baptist Ministers' Fellowship.²⁷

²⁵ It is interesting to note also that Isaac Watts' books were republished in the 1811 edition of his *Works* (edited by G. Burder). Those that advocate the pre-existence doctrine are in Vol. VI.

²⁶ For a survey of Strict Baptists see P. Toon, "English Strict Baptists", *Baptist Quarterly*, Jan. 1965.

²⁷ These are available from Pastor S. T. Hover of Maidstone, Kent.

[Similar developments have from time to time disturbed the Darbyite (Exclusive) wing of the Brethren movement, such as (last century) the "heavenly humanity" views of C. H. Mackintosh and others (cf. S. P. Tregelles, *Five Letters to the Editor of "The Record" on Recent Denials of*

Ironically the *Gospel Standard* Strict Baptists, who defended orthodox Christology against errors (which may be traced back to Hussey), became, and still are, the chief defenders of Hussey's "no-offer" doctrine in England. On the other hand, those churches which supported the views of Stevens are now, in general, advocates of the free offer of Christ, in the preaching of the gospel, to all men. Certainly, English Evangelicalism would benefit if the whole Strict and Particular Baptist denomination could be cured once and for ever of the ills brought into its midst by the influence of Hussey and his disciples.²⁸

Thorne, near Doncaster.

our Lord's Vicarious Life [London, 1864], pp. 21, 27 ff.) and the Apollinarianism of F. E. Raven (cf. N. Noel, *The History of the Brethren* [Denver, Colo., 1936], pp. 499 ff.) and (this century) the denial of our Lord's Eternal Sonship by James Taylor, Senior (cf. N. Noel, *op. cit.*, pp. 600 ff.). —EDITOR.]

²⁸ For access to the rare books used in this study I must thank the Librarians of New College, London; Dr. Williams's Library; The Evangelical Library; and The Minster Library, York. Dr. G. F. Nuttall and Ian Sellers, M.A., B.Litt., made helpful criticisms.