

THE THEOLOGY OF THOMAS CHALMERS

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A Thesis  
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Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
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"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

"The Expulsive Power of a New Affection."

"Moonlight preaching ripens no harvest."

"A oneness in conduct will often lead  
to an essential oneness in creed."

"I'm apt to think the man  
That could surround the sum of things, and spy  
The heart of God and secrets of His empire,  
Would speak but love--with him the bright result  
Would change the hue of intermediate scenes,  
And make one thing of all theology."

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Bridgewater Treatise---Thomas Chalmers, On the Power, Wisdom and Goodness of God, as Manifested in the Adaptation of External Nature to the Moral and Intellectual Constitution of Man.

"Christianity"---Thomas Chalmers, "Christianity," David Brewster, editor, The Edinburgh Encyclopedia, VI, 355--96.

Correspondence---William Hanna, editor, A Selection from the Correspondence of Thomas Chalmers.

CW---Thomas Chalmers, The Works of Thomas Chalmers.

Memoirs--William Hanna, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers.

NBR---Thomas Chalmers, Review of J. D. Morell, An Historical and Critical View of the Speculative Philosophy of Europe in the Nineteenth Century, in The North British Review, February 1847. pp. 271--331.

Predestination---Thomas Chalmers, Five Lectures on Predestination.

PW---William Hanna, editor, Posthumous Works of Thomas Chalmers.

SW---William Hanna, editor, Select Works of Thomas Chalmers.

## PREFACE

On more than one occasion the subject of this thesis has provoked the question, "Has that not been written on before?" The surprising answer is, "No." Many pages have been used to discuss other approaches to this famous Scotsman, but there has been no attempt at a thorough study of his theology. It has been my privilege to undertake such a task, and the purpose of this thesis is to present the results of this research. No great discoveries have been made, but the spirit of the man who inspired the first students of New College has returned to shed light and life to at least one more student for the Christian ministry.

The scope of this thesis must exclude a treatment of Chalmers' ecclesiology, including his views on the sacraments and on the relation between Church and State. Except for occasional references his attitude toward social questions is also omitted. These have already been dealt with in other studies, and their treatment here would take us too far afield from our primary purpose--to present an exposition of the theology of Thomas Chalmers.

American spelling has been followed throughout this thesis, except when quoting from a British writer.

This time of study in Scotland has been made possible through the Alumni Fellowship of Columbia Theological Seminary, and to the faculty and alumni of this institution I

shall always be grateful.

It is an interesting side-light that as Principal of New College and as Professor of Divinity, Thomas Chalmers was the "first parent" of my two faculty advisers, the Reverend Principal Hugh Watt and the Very Reverend Professor John Baillie. Both have spoken words of criticism and words of encouragement, and I appreciate their patient interest and valuable help. Many thanks are also expressed to the Reverend Professor J. H. S. Burleigh and the Reverend Principal C. S. Duthie for their assistance.

The staffs of the National Library of Scotland, St. Andrews University Library, Aberdeen University Library, Edinburgh University Library, and the Church of Scotland Library have been helpful in providing research material. But to the Reverend J. B. Primrose and Miss E. R. Leslie, of New College Library, are due the highest words of praise and appreciation for the cheerful and sympathetic way in which they have assisted in this study.

W. P. H.

Edinburgh, Scotland

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## CHAPTER I

### A. INTRODUCTORY: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The life of Thomas Chalmers was most ably written soon after his death by his son-in-law, William Hanna, who has been the primary authority for the later biographies.<sup>1</sup> Different aspects of the practical side of his ministry have also received thorough treatment. This chapter is not written with the intention of adding anything to the biographical material in these books; it is only meant to be a summary of that material in order that some idea may be given of the man whose theology is being considered. To a degree greater than that of most theologians, his theology must be understood against the background of his persuasive personality. In this chapter prominence will be given to those things in his life which throw light on his theological views.

#### I. EARLY LIFE (1780--1803)

In the little seaport town of Anstruther, Fifeshire, Thomas Chalmers was born on 17 March 1780. With a landed ancestry who had contributed not a few ministers to the Church of Scotland, this "fine boy named Tom" grew up in a

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<sup>1</sup> Biographers include W. Garden Blaikie, Frances E. Cooke, James Dodds, Donald Fraser, Mrs. Oliphant, Adam Philip, Norman L. Walker, and Jean L. Watson.

family of fourteen children, whose parents were hearty followers of Calvinistic theology and noble examples of unostentatious piety. At the age of three he began his education in the parish school, not so much because of a yearning for knowledge, but to escape the tyranny of a nurse whose cruelty and deceitfulness did much to make his home-life miserable. He gave little evidence of being hungry for knowledge, and by some of his schoolmates he is described as "one of the idlest, strongest, merriest, and most generous-hearted boys in Anstruther school."<sup>1</sup> However, he had developed a keen interest in reading, and the books which took the strongest hold on his thoughts were The Pilgrim's Progress and Gaudentio di Lucca. Though it does not appear that the Bible made a very deep impression in his early years, certain narratives seemed to catch his imagination. In illustration of this, it is told that during his fourth year he was found alone in the nursery, pacing up and down, and repeating to himself in an excited way, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"<sup>2</sup>

At an early age he announced his intention of being a minister, and before he was twelve he was sent to St. Andrews University. Through the first two years his interest was more with balls than with books, and his neglect of classical studies was a source of regret in later years. It was his third

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, I, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

year that has been called Chalmers' "intellectual birth-time." The study that captivated him was mathematics, and so ardently did he apply himself that years later he was still known as "Mr. Chalmers, the mathematician." His keen interest in this exact science indicated that mathematical trend of mind which was to influence so strongly his system of theology. In both thought and action, he was a lover of order. To Professor Thomas Brown he was indebted for his first interest in mathematics, and to him he wrote in 1833, "Of all my living instructors, I have ever reckoned first yourself."<sup>1</sup>

If mathematics was his first interest, it was not his only field of study. His intellectual awakening had led him to question the strict Calvinism and narrow Toryism by which his father had schooled him. The atmosphere of the University stimulated further questioning, for we have his own testimony written toward the end of his life:

St. Andrews was at this time overrun with Moderatism, under the chilling influence of all that is properly and peculiarly gospel, insomuch that our confidence was nearly as entire in the sufficiency of natural theology as in the sufficiency of natural science.<sup>2</sup>

When he entered the divinity hall at the age of fifteen, he was engaged in certain works of philosophy and theology. With deep admiration for Godwin's Political Justice he faced the tenet of philosophical necessity, which, according to

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Chalmers, "Preface" to Sermons by the late Rev. Robert Coutts, p. vii.

Godwin, was the basis of universal doubt. A companion work was Jonathan Edwards' Treatise on Free Will, which he studied "with such ardour, that he seemed to regard nothing else, could scarcely talk of any thing else, and one was almost afraid of his mind losing its balance."<sup>1</sup> This author's view of necessity fitted in with the reasoning of Godwin, except that Edwards found philosophical necessity the basis of faith. In the spiritual as well as in the material universe, the whole series of events are bound together by "fixed unalterable links." Whatever doubts Godwin had injected, Edwards dispelled, and Chalmers continued throughout life to hold Edwards in highest regard as a Christian and as a thinker.<sup>2</sup> Twenty-four years later Chalmers described this period in his Journal:

I remember when a student of Divinity, and long ere I could relish evangelical sentiment, I spent nearly a twelve-month in a sort of mental elysium, and the one idea which ministered to my soul all its rapture was the magnificence of the Godhead, and the universal subordination of all things to the one great purpose for which He evolved and was supporting creation.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever brought him to earth we do not know; but he seemed to show no evidence of being such a "dreaming young philosophical enthusiast" when in the summer of 1796 he visited his brother in Liverpool. Several other intellectual

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, I, 16.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Dr. D. Stebbins, 30 May 1844, he referred to Edwards as "the greatest of theologians," combining intellect and piety. Correspondence, p. 443.

<sup>3</sup> Memoirs, I, 17.

and spiritual crises he was to pass through before reaching maturity, but this sublime conception of the Godhead was to remain a constituent part of his theological structure.

Two other features of his student days at St. Andrews should be mentioned. Conscious of a deficiency in expression, he gave himself to the art of English composition, and began to develop "that billowy rhythmic cadence which, in the spoken word, was to prove so moving to the minds and hearts of his hearers, but which in cold print, appears cumbrous and lumbering."<sup>1</sup> It is rather significant that the subject of one of his earliest discourses was a keynote to his whole life, especially his preaching and teaching. When Chalmers met four or five hundred of his brethren in the "Convocation of 1842," on the eve of the Disruption, it fell to him to stir them to an attitude capable of shouldering the responsibilities of an unendowed church. With that in view he concluded his appeal with a eulogy of enthusiasm which awakened thunderous applause. After his death this eulogy was found to be an exact transcript from this student discourse. While in the process of developing his style, he gave vent to his eloquence through the art of public prayer. Taking his turn with the other students in leading daily prayers in the public hall, he made such a profound impression that "the people of St.

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Watt, Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption, pp. 17--8.

Andrews flocked when they knew that Chalmers was to pray."<sup>1</sup>  
 Strange boy of sixteen!

There is little mention made as to the actual contents of the curriculum. It may be significant that in later years he had to relearn both Hebrew and Greek. The atmosphere of St. Andrews was extremely Moderate. The Principal of St. Marys, Dr. Hill, had been the head of this party of the church since Robertson's retirement in 1780, and his lectures in divinity, though very lucid and systematic, gave little warmth to the cold theological climate. The Moderate emphasis on natural theology was certainly reflected in the teaching, and this emphasis was to remain with Chalmers even through his days of evangelical fervor.<sup>2</sup>

On finishing his theological studies, he accepted a position as tutor in a large family. His experience was not happy, for his sensitive nature was often disturbed by inconsiderate hours and unkind treatment. On one occasion his employer accused him of having too much pride. He would not deny the charge, but showed a ready wit in hurling it back on the accuser: "There are two kinds of pride, Sir. There is that pride which lords it over inferiors ; and there is that pride which rejoices in repressing the insolence of superiors. The first I have none of--the second I glory in."<sup>3</sup> Such a

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, I, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Watt, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Memoirs, I, 32.

reply showed a very definite streak of independence which was never to leave him. Soon afterwards he gave up the position.

He had not completed his nineteenth year when he applied to be licensed as a minister of the gospel. The minimum age was twenty-one, but under a clause allowing for exceptional cases, a minister pleaded his case, describing him as "a lad o' pregnant pairts." On 31 July 1799, he was licensed by the Presbytery of St. Andrews. He showed little interest in the work of his new calling. Instead of accepting invitations to supply pulpits, he made a visit to England. There, in Wigan, on 25 August 1799, he preached his first sermon. His brother wrote his father that "he was in general well liked. . . . It is the opinion of those who pretend to be judges, that he will shine in the pulpit, but as yet he is rather awkward in appearance." And it was significant that he added, "His mathematical studies seem to occupy more of his time than the religious."<sup>1</sup>

Returning from England he spent the next two winters at Edinburgh University. He studied mathematics under Professor Playfair, chemistry under Professor Black and Professor Hope, and philosophy under Dugald Stewart. But the professor for whom he at once entertained the profoundest admiration, and to whom he was most indebted, was Professor Robison, who gave him a high admiration for the Baconian

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

method of investigation, which led him to a deep appreciation of Butler. Robison also guided him through one of the religious crises of his career. It arose from the views which he found in System de la Nature, published under the name of Mirabaud, but edited by the Baron von Holbach.<sup>1</sup> That rigid uniformity of natural law seemed to point him to materialism and deism. Climaxing his argument Mirabaud cried out:

O Nature: sovereign of all beings! and ye, her adorable daughters, Virtue, Reason, and Truth! remain for ever our revered protectors; it is to you that belong the praises of the human race, to you appertains the homage of the earth. Show us then, O Nature!<sup>2</sup>

Faced with such a naturalism, Chalmers began to ask himself-- Does not this cut the ground from under the theistic position? Was God necessary, after all, in such a world of mechanical perfection? Years later he described this work as one fitted, "by its gorgeous generalizations on nature and truth and the universe, to make tremendous impression on the unpractised reader."<sup>3</sup>

The searching skeptic found direction from at least three rays of light. Dugald Stewart's lectures on Reid's philosophy and Beattie's Essay on Truth shed light on the priority of common sense as a reliable standard of truth for all men. A second ray came from Professor Robison's instructions in natural philosophy, which led him to ponder the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Flint, Anti-Theistic Theories, pp. 473--4.

<sup>2</sup> M. de Mirabaud, The System of Nature, p. 519.

<sup>3</sup> Memoirs, I, 45.

remarkable harmony between the human mind and the processes of nature, the wonderful adaptation of the one to the other, and thus the conclusion that this must be due to an intelligent Divine Being who had framed these adaptations. A third ray of light came from prayer. The year before his death he gave this advice to a young friend struggling under the shadows of skepticism:

Under all the difficulties and despondencies of such a state, I would still encourage you to prayer. Cry as you can. With real moral earnestness, and a perseverance in this habit, light will at length arise out of darkness.<sup>1</sup>

Watt has pointed out that this advice was no mere conventional injunction to piety, but real autobiography.<sup>2</sup> He had at least begun to become acquainted with personal religion.

These three rays of light, as we have called them, never went out for Chalmers. As we shall see later, his theology was profoundly affected by the philosophic principles in the common-sense approach of Stewart and Beattie. The adaptations to which Robison had guided him were the theme of his Bridgewater Treatise and one of the corner-stones of his natural theology. And prayer had an ever-increasing place in his devotional and practical life.

During the Edinburgh studies he had looked upon a call to occupy a pulpit as an "interruption" in his pursuit of

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Watt, op. cit., p. 20.

knowledge, and only once did he yield to such an annoyance.<sup>1</sup> His interests still centered in scientific studies, and his ambition aimed at academic rather than ecclesiastical goals. If only he could serve a parish within range of a university and combine a clerical appointment with his scholastic pursuits. When he heard of the possibility of a vacancy at Kilmany, near St. Andrews, he made an effort to secure the appointment.

In the meantime he served as an assistant at Cavers in Roxburghshire. He discharged his duties for about a year with fair regularity and diligence, but without hard work. In a letter to his father he showed that his chief interest was not inclined toward the ministry.

Hawick, July 23, 1802.

DEAR FATHER,--I have been much resorted to of late for my assistance on sacramental occasions. This, in so thinly peopled a country, necessarily subjects me to long journeys, which I find, however, to be a pleasant and healthy relief from the labours of study. I don't think I will ever allow myself to be so carried away with the attractions of science as not to intermingle a sufficient degree of exercise and amusement.

I am, Yours affectionately,  
THOMAS CHALMERS.<sup>2</sup>

How Chalmers in a few years must have despised these words: "sacramental occasions" offering "exercise and amusement" from "attractions of science."

On 2 November 1802, Chalmers was elected minister of

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<sup>1</sup> This first sermon in Scotland was preached in Penicuik. Memoirs, I, 40.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

Kilmany. For the average twenty-two-year-old probationer for the ministry, this appointment would have been of supreme importance. But to Chalmers it was merely a stepping-stone toward achieving his chief ambition--to become a professor of mathematics. He had earlier received an appointment, for the ensuing session, as assistant to Professor Vilant at St. Andrews, and it was his plan to conduct the two offices--the academic and the ministerial--simultaneously. He proved to be a very popular teacher among the students and succeeded in inspiring them with love for the subject. Often his eloquence and his imagination took him far afield from the subject of mathematics, but this was only foreshadowing his future practice of relating all subjects to his religious outlook. At the end of the session he felt his independence invaded and his pride punctured when Professor Vilant issued certificates to his class without consulting him. A public explosion was followed by his dismissal as an instructor.

## II. KILMANY (1803--15)

Ordained on 12 May 1803 by the Presbytery of Cupar, he entered his work at Kilmany with an even stronger determination to attain academic distinction. It was not the ministry, but mathematics, that held first place in his heart. His reputation as a teacher would never be admirable as long as the stigma of his dismissal remained. He set up rival classes

at St. Andrews, first in mathematics and later in chemistry. These he continued for two winters, and the frequent and fierce opposition gradually turned into generous and enthusiastic applause. He felt his reputation in the academic world vindicated. During the college sessions he spent his week-ends at Kilmany, where he preached and paid urgent pastoral visits. His eloquence in the pulpit and his friendliness in the parish gave him average success. But still he frowned on "the dull and unvaried course of a clergyman's life."

Attempting to enliven the situation he came forward as a candidate for literary fame. His first publication was an attempt to defend "pluralities." In his zeal he made statements that within a few years he would have to recant. In particular there was this:

The author of this pamphlet can assert, from what to him is the highest of all authority, the authority of his own experience, that after the satisfactory discharge of his parish duties, a minister may enjoy five days in the week of uninterrupted leisure for the prosecution of any science in which his taste may dispose him to engage.<sup>1</sup>

Years afterwards when he made a speech in the General Assembly on the evil of "pluralities," he was confronted with his earlier words. He confessed having penned them, but in the days of spiritual blindness. The discussion involved a chair of

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Chalmers, Observations on a Passage in Mr. Playfair's Letter to the Lord Provost of Edinburgh relative to the Mathematical Pretensions of the Scottish Clergy, p. 10.

mathematics. "What, sir," he asked, "are the objects of mathematical science? Magnitude and proportions of magnitude. But then, sir, I had forgotten two magnitudes. I thought not of the littleness of time. I recklessly thought not of the greatness of eternity."<sup>1</sup>

His second publication came out in 1808 and dealt with political economy.<sup>2</sup> Coupling together his intense patriotism and the economic uncertainties of the Napoleonic struggle, he made several novel proposals that are now accepted practice.

The great event of Kilmany, yea, of his whole life, was about to take place. He was seized by a new insight of the Christian gospel and a new conception of the Christian ministry. So radical was this transformation that "he himself believed, that upon the change which then took place his own salvation hinged."<sup>3</sup> Many efforts have been made to give an exact date for his spiritual awakening. This difficulty in timing is largely accounted for in the fact that there were several stages in Chalmers' awakening and that there seems to have been a sequential relation with the previous crisis. His biographer says that "the first step towards his own true and thorough conversion unto God" was made in 1806 on the death of his brother George.<sup>4</sup> Though the first death of a

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, III, 78.

<sup>2</sup> An Enquiry into the Extent and Stability of National Resources.

<sup>3</sup> PW, VI, xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Memoirs, I, 102.

close relative witnessed by Chalmers would naturally make a deep impression on him, there is little evidence of a transformation in the life or work of the minister of Kilmany.

Within two years his sister Barbara died from the consumptive disease that had taken his brother. This was not the actual climax of his crisis, but it had a definite impact. Her death led him to ask David Brewster, the editor of the prospective Edinburgh Encyclopedia, to entrust him with the article on "Christianity." (He was already working on the article on "Trigonometry.") It was not the content of Christianity, but its credentials, that interested him. His concern for the evidence for the truth of Christianity must have grown out of his escape from skepticism about 1801. Many of his discussions in the "Evidences of Christianity" were said to have been delivered from the pulpit at Cavers. In a lecture delivered to his chemistry class at St. Andrews he praised the work of Paley and stressed the external evidences for the truth of Christianity. Hanna gave us a most significant statement in reference to Chalmers' views during the period of 1808--9:

Of the truth of Christianity he had a firm and unwavering belief. He unhesitatingly believed that the Scriptures are the Word of God, and that the Christian system is divine. In this conviction he had been firmly established at an early period of life, by reading Bishop Butler's Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion, &c. He told me that it was Butler's Analogy that made him a Christian.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

What did Chalmers mean by this statement? His later eulogies of Butler indicate the value that he placed on his writings, but had Butler's Analogy been the instrument of his religious experience at Kilmany? The evidence seems to indicate that this statement referred to his study of the evidences of Christianity in earlier years, and that Butler's Analogy was at that time the leading instrument in convincing him of Christianity's divine origin, perhaps as the sealing confirmation to Paley's views, which he highly regarded. According to his conception of Christianity before the Kilmany awakening, anyone who accepted as true the divine origin of Christianity was a Christian. Thus it was under the impressions of his sister's death that he wished to revive and re-establish the convictions of earlier years and condense them into an apologetic statement for the divine origin of Christianity.

In June 1809 the news of the death of his favorite uncle found him with a severe illness that confined him to his room for four months, prevented him from entering the pulpit for six months, and affected him for a whole year. Three members of his family had died in the past three years, and he believed he was next. The subject of religion assumed a new aspect of importance, and he recognized how perverse had been his scale of values. "The significance of time" dwindled before "the magnitude of eternity." If permitted to live, he would devote his whole self--mind and heart--to the gospel ministry. In

such a man as Pascal the transition had been made from the walks of mathematical science to the higher walk of faith. Might not he be able to follow in Pascal's footsteps? Looking unto Pascal through his Thoughts on Religion, Chalmers labored to effect this change. With a character that could not stand "the scrutiny of the sick-room," he began to keep a most vigilant eye on his habits and life. During this period of strenuous self-examination, he was under the domination of what he called the "religious principle," and he began to find a higher place for the atonement of Jesus Christ. Throughout 1810 he continued this self-scrutiny and gave an increasingly larger place to his ministerial duties.

Asking, seeking, knocking--the treasure was soon to be found. As Pascal had led him to the primacy of religion, so did Wilberforce lead him to the primacy of grace. Writing to his brother Alexander some years later about this spiritual crisis, he referred to the failure of his effort "to elevate my practice to the standard of the Divine requirement." Referring to the insight that Wilberforce's Practical View gave him, he continued:

I am now most thoroughly of opinion, and it is an opinion founded on experience, that on the system of Do this and live, no peace, and even no true and worthy obedience, can ever be attained. It is, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. When this belief enters the heart, joy and confidence enter along with it. . . . We look to God in a new light--we see Him as a reconciled Father; that love to Him which terror scares away re-enters the heart, and, with a new principle

and a new power, we become new creatures in Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>1</sup>

"Looking unto Thomas" had been transformed into "looking unto Jesus." The precise date cannot be given. In December 1810 he was reading Wilberforce's Practical View. On 23 February 1811 he wrote in his Journal, "I feel myself upon the eve of some decisive transformation in point of religious sentiment."<sup>2</sup> At that time he was interested in Scott's Force of Truth. On 28 August he wrote to a friend, "Viewed as an experimental Christian, I am still in my infancy."<sup>3</sup> Therefore the change must be dated some time between the February and August of 1811.

No one can better describe the effect of his change than Chalmers himself. During his first year in Glasgow he wrote a message to the inhabitants of Kilmany, from which we quote:

Here I cannot but record the effect of an actual though undesigned experiment, which I prosecuted for upwards of twelve years among you. For the greater part of that time I could expatiate on the meanness of dishonesty, on the villainy of falsehood, on the despicable arts of calumny. . . . It never occurred to me that all this might have been done, and yet the soul of every hearer have remained in full alienation from God. . . . I made no attempt against the natural enmity of the mind to God. . . . And it was not till I got impressed by the utter alienation of the heart in all its desires and affections from God; . . . it was not till I took the scriptural way of laying the method of reconciliation before them; that I ever heard of any of those subordinate reformations which I

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 185--6.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished Journal, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Memoirs, I, 237.

aforetime made. . . . You have at least taught me that to preach Christ is the only effective way of preaching morality in all its branches. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The change became very apparent in his ministerial work. His preaching began to follow those evangelical lines that formerly he had held in contempt. A new power turned his eloquence into an instrument for a religious awakening. His church became crowded, and his fame as a preacher spread far beyond the borders of his parish. Visitation of the flock and instruction of the young were now objects of supreme importance and great delight. In the manse he introduced family worship, morning and evening. He gave himself to regular and earnest study of the Bible, which had become to him the living Word of God. A Bible society was established in the parish and he became an enthusiastic supporter of foreign missions. He continued his work for the Edinburgh Christian Instructor, and in 1813 his article on "Christianity" was published. He did not entirely abandon his interest in scientific pursuits, but turned these studies into promoting the cause of Christianity. Instead of "the dull and unvaried course of a clergyman's life," he could now write his brother James:

The truth is, that a minister, if he gives his whole heart to his business finds employment for every moment of his existence; and I am every day getting more in love with my professional duties, and more penetrated with a sense of their importance.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Chalmers, The Duty of Giving an Immediate Diligence to the Business of the Christian Life: An Address to the Inhabitants of the Parish of Kilmany, pp. 40--3.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs, I, 212.

### III. GLASGOW (1815--23)

The country parish could not retain this "son of thunder." The city crowds were calling. In 1814 he was appointed to fill the vacancy of one of Glasgow's leading churches, and on 21 July 1815 he was inducted as minister of the Tron Church. There he ministered for four years, when he was transferred to St. John's, the parish especially designed for him, for a ministry of four years.

From his first sermon his name was made as a preacher. His fame as a pulpit orator soon reached its climax, but throughout his life he was distinguished as a prince of the pulpit. The "torrent of popularity" fell heavily upon him when he delivered the Astronomical Discourses at special Thursday noon services. When published, they "ran like wild-fire through the country" and in the first year nine editions were sold. Two other volumes of sermons were published and had a wide circulation. He threw his support to the Bible and the Foreign Mission Societies, and members of the Evangelical Party began to look to him as their pulpit leader. His visit to London in 1817 brought forth testimonies of popularity which are almost unbelievable. "The tartan beats us all," said Mr. Canning, one of his many prominent listeners.<sup>1</sup> And Robert Hall, "the greatest pulpit orator in England," wrote

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, II, 102.

thus to him, "It would be difficult not to congratulate you on the unrivalled and unbounded popularity which attended you in the metropolis. . . . The attention which your sermons have excited is probably unequalled in modern literature."<sup>1</sup>

His pulpit work was not without pastoral support. Visiting the flock was a must for him, and though necessarily brief, his visits would sometimes reach over two hundred people in one day. He divided his parish--both Tron and St. John's--into districts and placed in charge of each an elder and a deacon. The elder would organize and conduct the Sunday School in his district,<sup>2</sup> and have general oversight of the spiritual welfare of the people. The deacon followed the New Testament example of caring for the poor. Chalmers was a vigorous opponent of the Poor Law suggested for Scotland, and he spent hours speaking and writing against what he felt was a "legalized poverty." Instead of assessment, support for the poor should be provided from the generosity of voluntary givers, and his deacons served as investigators and distributors under his plan, which proved its merit for some years after he left Glasgow.

Success marked his endeavors in private as well as in public life. His daily schedule, to which he stubbornly

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> When Chalmers came to Tron Church, there was one general Sunday School with 100 children; when he left, there were forty district Sunday Schools with 1200 children. Ibid., pp. 122--6.

adhered, provided for at least five hours of study, and there was always time for a most extensive and multifarious correspondence. Many visitors record the hospitality they enjoyed in the manse and testify to the warm affection between husband and wife, between parents and daughters. Readings from Chalmers' private Journal relate periods of deep spiritual growth, when the Bible was his primarius liber and when special attention was given to devotional books.<sup>1</sup>

At the very height of his success the city and parish were stunned by the news that he had accepted an appointment to the Chair of Moral Philosophy at St. Andrews University. The educated admired him for holding together what had wrongly been divorced--Evangelicalism and culture, scientific advancement and Bible study, philosophy and gospel truth. The poor looked to him as the champion of their right to educational opportunity and religious worship. From every class of society came expressions of admiration and appreciation, testifying to the city's sense that, as expressed by the Lord Provost, it was "losing its brightest ornament."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> General reference was made to Thomas à Kempis and Samuel Rutherford and special reference to Guthrie's Trial of a Saving Interest in Christ, Owen's On Indwelling Sin, and Romaine's Life of Faith, Walk of Faith, Triumph of Faith. Ibid., pp. 453--7.

<sup>2</sup> Farewell Memorial to Dr. Chalmers, p. 16.

#### IV. ST. ANDREWS (1823--28)

As Professor of Moral Philosophy he showed his disavowal of traditional methods, as he had done as a parish minister. Following Adam Smith in regarding his chair as one of ethical science proper, rather than of psychology or mental science generally, he lectured and assigned reading to cover the science of ethics--"philosophy of duty." The first part of his course dealt with the "moralities which reciprocate between man and man" and those "which connect earth with heaven." The latter part led into a discussion of natural theology, the precursor of Christian theology. With this renovation of method and the eloquence of his delivery students from far and near crowded his classroom. Demonstrations of appreciation caused him more than once to plead for students to be more active with their heads than with their heels. Many have borne testimony that to him they are indebted for awakening or stimulating their intellectual activity.

Here as in Glasgow, he was not to confine his labors to one field. A Sunday School for neighborhood children was begun in his home, and soon he had several students organizing and conducting Sunday Schools after the fashion of the Glasgow elders. A weekly Bible class for students was held in his home, using his Scripture References as a textbook. Among

the students his missionary zeal spread, and recruits for the foreign field began to average more than one for each college session, Alexander Duff being perhaps the most prominent.

Besides his regular lectures in moral philosophy and in natural theology, and his special lectures in political economy, Chalmers' pen was busy with two volumes for the press. The first was the concluding volume of The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns, in which he condemned both the Poor Law and the Combination Laws. His other publication, On Literary and Ecclesiastical Endowments, conveyed many of his ideas for improvement in all branches of Scotland's educational system. In addition to his writing there was much traveling during this period. A visit to Belfast inaugurating a new venture there and a visit to London opening the new church of Edward Irving, his Glasgow assistant, were the most notable occasions. Most significant for the future was his increasing interest in the General Assembly, where he was becoming a leading spokesman for the Evangelical Party.

Among his university colleagues Chalmers was almost unique in his Evangelical fervor. A few months after arrival at St. Andrews he wrote, "Perhaps there is no town in Scotland more cold and meagre in its theology than St. Andrews."<sup>1</sup> His family often heard Evangelical preaching at the Dissenting Chapel, and in opposition to other members of the faculty,

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, III, 80.

he favored removing compulsory attendance at the University Church in order to give students a freer choice in their place of worship. There is a sentence uttered in the heat of the controversy which foreshadowed things to come and which is here recorded because it expresses so well the key to his ecclesiology:

I have no veneration for the Church of Scotland merely quasi an Establishment, but I have the utmost veneration for it quasi an instrument of Christian good; and I do think that with the means and resources of an Establishment, she can do more, and does more, for the religious interests of Scotland than is done by the activity of all the Dissenters put together.<sup>1</sup>

During his St. Andrews incumbency Chalmers had received offers of various offices, notably that of Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of London. To none did he accede, but when the Chair of Theology in the University of Edinburgh was offered, he could not refuse. In 1828 he left St. Andrews, but not in the same condition as he had found it. Lord Rosebery, in speaking of what Chalmers had done for Glasgow, said, "He warmed it."<sup>2</sup> Alexander Duff, in speaking of what Chalmers had done for St. Andrews, said, "Religion, which had long settled down at zero, or many degrees below it, was sensibly raised in its temperature, and in some instances kindled into an inextinguishable flame."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Archibald P. Primrose (Lord Rosebery), Dr. Chalmers, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Memoirs, III, 200.

V. EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY (1828--43)

Having delivered his introductory lecture "amid rapturous applause," Chalmers received an enthusiastic response from regular students and the general public during his fifteen years at the University. His spirit was fresh and his method was new. Prominence was given at the opening of his course to ethics, natural theology, and the evidences of Christianity. He then plunged into Christian dogmatics, beginning with man's moral condition as actually seen and known, and tracing the provision that had been made for his restoration to righteousness and to God. A revised form of these lectures was later published in his Institutes of Theology. Besides his regular lectures, it was his practice to comment on several of his textbooks--Butler's Analogy, Paley's Evidences, and Hill's Lectures in Divinity.

During these years Chalmers completed what he regarded as his magnum opus, a work on political economy. Its cool reception brought him disappointment, though some of its parts were highly commended by John Stuart Mill. His work in the field of practical economics, in regard to both pauperism and church finance, proved to be of more value than his contributions as a theoretical economist. In 1832 some of his thoughts on natural theology were included in his Bridgewater Treatise. Another major work of this period was

his Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans, stressing the expository rather than the exegetical and critical. Beginning in 1841 and continuing until his death, he recorded the devotional reflections arising from his daily Bible reading, and these were published posthumously as the Horae Biblicae Quotidianae and the Horae Biblicae Sabbaticae.

In 1816 the University of Glasgow had conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity, the first in a lengthy series of notable recognitions. He became a King's chaplain in 1830, and four years later he was made a Corresponding Member of the Royal Institute of Paris, which resulted in a visit in 1838 to the French capital where his lecturing and preaching received the usual enthusiastic response. Oxford University made him a Doctor of Laws in 1835. Twice during this period he was presented at court in London, in 1830 to King William IV and in 1837 to Queen Victoria.

In his political views Chalmers was a "thorough Conservative," though he never allied himself with any party. His reaction to drastic changes being made in the constitution of the United Kingdom was very pronounced, and whenever such changes had definitely religious implications, the eloquence of Thomas Chalmers could not be silenced. It was after his "electrical" speech on behalf of Roman Catholic Emancipation that Lord Jeffrey recorded that "never had eloquence produced a greater effect upon a popular assembly,

and that he could not believe more had ever been done by the oratory of Demosthenes, Cicero, Burke, or Sheridan."<sup>1</sup> His stand for the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts (1828), and later the Corn Laws (1846), seemed to contradict his stand against the Reform Bill (1832), but here his belief in the power of the Christian Gospel was definitely involved. Declaring that "the dearest object of my earthly existence is the elevation of the common-people--humanized by Christianity,"<sup>2</sup> Chalmers feared that the Reform Bill would encourage people to put their hope for a better society in a political panacea rather than in the Christian Gospel. Any plan or movement that tended to discount the exclusive position of Christianity as the means of social, as well as of personal, progress Chalmers was against.<sup>3</sup>

The main activity during his Edinburgh life was connected with the more practical side of the church's life, but since this had less bearing on his theological thought, the highlights are only mentioned. Two questions deeply concerned

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<sup>1</sup> E. B. Ramsay, A Biographical Notice of the late Thomas Chalmers, D.D., LL.D., p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs, III, 433. (Italics are mine.)

<sup>3</sup> Joseph John Gurney, Chalmeriana, p. 84, recorded these words of Chalmers: "I am not one of those who underrate the value of civil and political liberty; but I am well assured that it is only the principles of Christianity which can impart true security, prosperity, and happiness, either to individuals or to nations. I am prepared to expect that, on the efforts we are now making in the world to regenerate our species, without religion, God will impress the stamp of a solemn and expressive mockery."

him: the extension of the church, and the spiritual independence of the church. As Chairman of the Church Extension Committee, 1835--41, he was responsible for building 220 new churches in Scotland. Though he was opposed to the voluntary system of church finance, he was forced to turn to the public for necessary funds when the government refused assistance. He was a strong supporter of the Establishment principle, even after the Disruption, but only because state aid was a sine qua non to the accomplishment of his dream "to turn Scotland into a spiritual garden." His famous London lectures in 1838 pointed out that the chief distinction of an Established Church is "that by it, and it only, the whole mass of the community, down to the meanest and most worthless, could be reached and thoroughly pervaded."<sup>1</sup>

In correlation to this question of church extension was his concern for the spiritual independence of the church. Though it was the state's duty to provide financial support for the church, it was the church's responsibility to be self-determining "in things ecclesiastical," on the ground of principle (Biblical) and on the ground of expediency ("the Christian good of Scotland!").<sup>2</sup> In the Assembly of 1832, over which he presided as Moderator, there were the beginnings of concerted action to get rid of the evils that had grown up

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, IV, 40.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 596.

with the exercise of patronage, action that led to clashes between ecclesiastical and civil courts, culminating in the Disruption of 1843. Driven by the conviction that these evils threatened the spiritual independence of the church and that the loss of her independence was a threat to the very life of the church, Chalmers threw himself headlong into the struggle. He championed the rights of the church before committees of Parliament. He used his pen to address the public and his eloquence to address the church courts. He soon became the most influential leader of the Evangelicals, who were fighting against these invasions of the church's sphere of authority. The "Ten Years' Conflict" (1834--43) so provoked the cleavage between Evangelicals and Moderates that on 18 May 1843 the Free Church of Scotland was formed, and in a short time over 400 ministers, most of whom were Evangelicals, had left the Establishment to become a part of this new body.<sup>1</sup> For Chalmers it seemed a choice between Christ or the State as Head of the Church. In choosing the former, he did not recant his Establishment principle, but only subordinated it to the spiritual independence of the church. If Establishment were necessary for the bene-esse of the church, spiritual independence was necessary for the esse of the church.

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<sup>1</sup> The story was told from the side of the Free Church in Buchanan's The Ten Years' Conflict, and from the side of the Established Church in Bryce's Ten Years of the Church of Scotland. Watt's Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption dealt especially with Chalmers' part in the Disruption.

## VI. NEW COLLEGE (1843--47)

Chalmers served as Moderator of the first Free Church Assembly and immediately threw himself into "the outward business of the house of God." The support of the ministry and the housing of the congregations were his main interests, and to these problems he applied his previous work in economics. The result was the Sustentation Fund, which served as a basis of finance during the whole separate history of the Free Church. He not only thought out the plan, but brought it into successful operation.

Surrendering his professorship in the University, he became Principal of New College, serving as Professor of Divinity and directing the theological education of the Free Church. Following the general course of his university teaching, he continued to give intellectual and spiritual impulse to both regular students and general public, inspiring them to give to the people of Scotland "the blessing of well-filled pulpits and well-served parishes."<sup>1</sup>

But in the sunset of his labors Chalmers' interests were not confined to the borders of Scotland or to the ranks of Presbyterianism. In an 1843 address, commemorating the bicentenary of the Westminster Assembly, he began by referring to a slogan "Cooperation without incorporation," but asked

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<sup>1</sup> Watt, op. cit., p. 332.

that it be amended to another formula--"Cooperation now, and this with the view, as soon as may be, to incorporation afterwards."<sup>1</sup> In 1845 he expressed this principle in action by helping to form the Evangelical Alliance, and in the same year this "apostle of union" spoke these words:

Who cares about the Free Church compared with the Christian good of the people of Scotland? Who cares for any Church, but as an instrument of Christian good? For, be assured that the moral and religious well-being of the population is infinitely of higher importance than the advancement of any sect.<sup>2</sup>

With a new enthusiasm, even at the age of sixty-four, Chalmers began an experiment of his own to demonstrate the nature, meaning, and probable effect of a Universal Home Mission. In the West Port section of Edinburgh he carried out his "territorial principle" by leading a zealous group of men and women in the organization of a new church, which opened for worship on 19 February 1847. The next day he said:

I have got now the desire of my heart,--the church is finished, the schools are flourishing, our ecclesiastical machinery is about complete, and all in good working order. God has indeed heard my prayer, and I could now lay down my head in peace and die.<sup>3</sup>

With this sense of having finished his course, in less than four months later, on 30 May, Thomas Chalmers laid down his head in peace and died. Records indicate that few Edinburgh funerals have been witnessed by so many people, and a

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Chalmers, Christian Union, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs, IV, 394.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 411.

contemporary newspaper thus chronicles its impression: "It was the dust of a Presbyterian clergyman that the coffin contained; and yet they were burying him amid the tears of a nation, and with more than kingly honours."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Witness, 5 June 1847, quoted in Watt, op. cit., p. 344.

## B. INTRODUCTORY: THEOLOGICAL CLIMATE

With the main events in the life of Chalmers before us, it is well, if we are to comprehend fully his own theology, to survey the theological climate in which he lived. There is obviously an approach to absurdity in the very effort to describe in a few pages the trends of theological thought during the late years of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century; yet, with all its shortcomings, the effort must now be made in order to catch a glimpse of the theological scene in which Chalmers moved.

### I. PREVALENCE OF RATIONALISM

The eighteenth century was marked by a dominant rationalism, the placing of unbounding faith in the power of speculative reason to obtain ultimate truth. "I will believe nothing I cannot understand, and I understand only what conforms to the acknowledged rules of logic and can be explained to anyone of normal intelligence."<sup>1</sup> Coupled with, and often blended with, this dominant rationalism were the empirical tendencies that had flowed so strongly from the philosophy of Locke. While the extreme school of rationalism sought to derive all knowledge from the constitution of the mind itself, and the school of empiricism held that all know-

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology, pp. 14--5.

ledge rises purely from without from experienced perceptions, both were agreed in regarding all knowledge as something given, with the knowing mind as only its passive recipient.

This emphasis in Britain rose out of the strong intellectual interest in mathematical science at the beginning of the century, and its roots could so be traced to the mechanistic implications of Newtonian science that Randall claimed that "the history of thought in that age is largely the history of the spread to all fields of human interests of the methods and aims of Newtonian science."<sup>1</sup> Few were so daring as to deny that,

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night:  
God said, Let Newton be! and all was light.<sup>2</sup>

The prevailing rationalism met an opponent in David Hume, whose skepticism denied the possibility of demonstrative proof by any process of ratiocination. Adversaries to his skepticism appeared in many quarters, but from at least two directions the reaction was noteworthy. Acknowledging that Hume's Treatise of Human Nature (1738) had roused him from his dogmatism,<sup>3</sup> Kant aimed at vindicating for the principle of causality that universal and objective necessity which Hume, in his purely empirical fashion, had explained away as the

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<sup>1</sup> John Herman Randall, The Making of the Modern Mind, p. 389.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Pope, "Epitaph Intended for Sir Isaac Newton," The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope, p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> John Cunningham, The Church History of Scotland, II, 349.

deposit of mere non-rational custom. Knowledge depends not merely on sense experience but on the a priori "categories" whose regulative or legislative activity determines the knowledge that comes to us. In moving from Pure Reason to Practical Reason, and in applying his epistemology to theology or religion, Kant attacked the scholastic proofs of God's existence and asserted that God is a postulate of the moral consciousness, thus repudiating the position that the idea of God can be arrived at by any purely theoretical path.<sup>1</sup>

In Scotland a reaction to Hume took the form of common sense philosophy. With Thomas Reid (Inquiry into the Human Mind, 1764) as its leading proponent, and Beattie (Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, 1770) as its popular proponent, "it maintained that the starting point of sound philosophy must be the instinctive beliefs, which though not logically demonstrable, are nevertheless real and indubitable, and must be accepted as the ultimate basis of faith and reason."<sup>2</sup> Dugald Stewart and Thomas Brown gave further development to this philosophy of common sense, and through their lectures in Edinburgh they exerted a definite influence on the thinking of Chalmers. Unfortunately both German and Scottish schools continued to develop along their own respective lines, without either greatly influencing the other.

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<sup>1</sup> Mackintosh, op. cit., pp. 23 ff.; Alfred Weber, History of Philosophy, pp. 433 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew J. Campbell, Two Centuries of the Church of Scotland, 1707--1929, p. 138.

## II. RATIONAL SUPERNATURALISM

These reactions to "rationalism proper" may have modified, but did not eradicate, its influence on theological activity throughout the eighteenth century. Looking back over the century, one may ask, What was its general effect on theology? For a summary answer we have observed what may be described as a positive strain of influence and a reactionary strain.

If the seventeenth century was a time of pouring theological dogma into creedal molds, the eighteenth was a time of freezing them into static forms. Under its positive influence theologians imbibed the principles and spirit of rationalism to such an extent that theology was virtually in a state of stagnation. Pfleiderer's description of this condition as "rational supernaturalism" has reference to a combination of faith in revealed religion and the empirical philosophy of Locke. The truth of revelation was based on external evidences, supported by miracles and prophecy in the Bible. Rational supernaturalism conceived the theology of revelation under Deistical forms and repudiated all vivid religious feeling as mystical "enthusiasm."<sup>1</sup> Even the Scottish piety could be described as intellectual rather than devotional.<sup>2</sup> The Calvinistic creed that had done much to mould

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<sup>1</sup> Otto Pfleiderer, The Development of Theology, p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> Cunningham, op. cit., p. 421.

the national character was largely intellectual, having been scholastically systematized in the Westminster Standards.

Development in the science of apologetics was a natural outgrowth of this rationalistic strain in theology. The Deistic controversy in Britain, mirroring the theological mind of the time, brought forth apologies from many Christian thinkers. The rule of reason gave much in common to Deist and orthodox opponent: the Christian just added Scripture to natural religion and "rational Christianity was substantially cryptodeism."<sup>1</sup> Butler's Analogy (1736) was an effort to discover a more impregnable safeguard, and as the "classic spokesman of the empirical school of ecclesiastics," he carried his defense only as far as the probability of analogical knowledge of God. "While reasoning by analogy is 'natural, just, and conclusive,' Butler yet recognized that his analogical argument offers no complete demonstration; he is content if it leaves the probabilities in favor of religion."<sup>2</sup> A priori reasoning is discounted in favor of a posteriori, and empirical facts become partly, if not wholly, the source of all knowledge. Philosophically, this was a tendency away from speculation toward common sense; religiously it was a tendency away from certainty toward skepticism. The Christian Evidences school was carried on by Nathaniel Lardner in his

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest Campbell Mossner, Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

Credibility of the Gospel History (1723--35) and culminated in Paley's Evidences (1794), a reintegration of Butler's method with Lardner's data. In this respect the movement during the century had been from abstract speculation toward a historical method, from internal evidences toward external.<sup>1</sup> Yet revelation itself continued under subjection to the strong prevalence of rationalism. This tendency was "to insist that revelation did not add anything essential to what was rationally discoverable but was merely a gracious 'republication' of rational truth to a world that was otherwise in danger of missing it, or of losing it after it had once been possessed."<sup>2</sup>

A divergence from these rationalistic tendencies was expressed in certain literary works of the period, which were not without some influence on the theological climate. There were the nature poetry of James Thomson, "the novels of sentiment" of Richardson and Fielding, the religious verse of Cowper--one of Chalmers' favorites. In Robert Burns was heard "the voice of nature breaking explosively through the crust of long-established convention. . . . He gave utterance to a new spirit--the spirit which was leaving the age of Reason behind and making ready for the age of Romance."<sup>3</sup> Another precursor of the next century was Adam Smith, who in his Wealth of

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<sup>1</sup> Vernon F. Storr, The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century, 1800--1860, pp. 44 ff.

<sup>2</sup> John Baillie, Preface to Revelation (John Baillie and Hugh Martin, co-editors), p. xv.

<sup>3</sup> Campbell, op. cit., pp. 138--9.

Nations (1776), found the determining element in life "in what the Psalmist calls the 'inward parts,' the soul of the individual issuing from its recesses in accordance with the necessities of its being in order to express itself and to establish relations."<sup>1</sup>

### III. REACTION--EVANGELICALISM

The reactionary strain of rationalism's influence on theology took the form of a revolt against the rule of reason. In Germany the recoil of a vital faith from rigid and dead orthodoxy had been stimulated by the Pietistic Movement, not so much against the radical rationalism of the Deists and their successors, as against the equally barren and formal orthodox rationalism of Lutheran scholasticism.<sup>2</sup> Led by a Lutheran pastor named Spener whose Pia Desideria (1675) called men to emphasize the "religion of the heart," the movement, whose purpose was not so much to remodel doctrine as to quicken spiritual life, continued through the eighteenth century to stress the subjective process of religion rather than the objective and tending toward what Brunner called a "one-sided Subjectivism."<sup>3</sup> Finally the appeal to inner experience was itself rationalized and systematically formulated by Kant, into whose thought the pietistic tradition entered

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> Randall, op. cit., p. 401.

<sup>3</sup> Emil Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, p. 33.

as a powerful factor.

Across the Channel a similar reaction against formal rationalism and moral laxity was being led by John Wesley. Putting his trust in faith rather than in reason, he revolted against deism, skepticism, and religious indifference within the Church of England. As a contemporary of Butler, Wesley rejected his conception of faith as being a cold intellectual conviction and contended for the conception of faith as an inward sentiment of instinctive feeling. For Wesley reason was impotent: our only true knowledge comes by the special spiritual organ of faith. Disavowing the power of reason or a purely intellectual conception of faith, Wesley stimulated the cause of Evangelicalism, which had been almost completely frozen out by the cold rationalism of the eighteenth century. Thus, in describing the state of religious life in Britain about 1800, Pfleiderer used the phrase "Evangelicalism" to complement the "Rational Supernaturalism," to which we have already referred.<sup>1</sup>

Wesley, as well as Whitefield, made many visits to Scotland, and though the immediate response was often tremendous, they never did receive their expected encouragement for their "new life" movement. After a 1784 visit to Scotland Wesley wrote in his Journal:

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<sup>1</sup> Pfleiderer, op. cit., p. 303.

I am amazed at this people. Use the most cutting words and apply them in the most pointed manner; still they hear, but feel no more than the seats they sit upon!<sup>1</sup>

After several weeks more of such effort, he could but hope that good might be done in Scotland, provided the preachers be "sons of thunder." "The misfortune is, they know everything; so they learn nothing." If this was Wesley's reaction to what he thought was an intellectual sophistication of Scotsmen, one can only imagine the reaction of creed-subscribing Scotsmen who heard Wesley declare in Glasgow in 1788: "The Methodists alone do not insist on your holding this or that opinion, but they think and let think."<sup>2</sup>

Though Evangelicalism had made no highway into Scotland from the Wesleyan Revival, it was beginning to make noticeable inroads. During the eighteenth century the Church of Scotland was divided into two generally recognized camps, known as the Moderate Party and the Popular Party, the latter title being gradually changed to Evangelical. At the close of the century the distinction was more pronounced and became increasingly so until the Disruption in 1843. During the middle of the eighteenth century the Moderates were at the helm, but with the retirement of Principal Robertson in 1780, they began to decrease in influence; soon after the

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<sup>1</sup> Nehemiah Curnock, editor, The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., VI, 499.

<sup>2</sup> William Law Mathieson, Church and Church Reform in Scotland, 1797--1843, pp. 48--9.

turn of the century the Evangelicals began to win decisions in church courts so that by 1834 they had gained a definite majority.

The main dividing line between the two groups appeared in the respective attitudes to the exercise of patronage. Other dividing lines have been suggested to place the two parties into two distinctively separate camps, but the attempt becomes difficult when one recognizes the varying shades of Moderatism and of Evangelicalism within the respective parties. The Moderates gave more attention to scholarly pursuits and literary taste. The Latitudinarian Movement had infiltrated their ranks in the eighteenth century, but in the nineteenth their tendency was more toward conservatism in ecclesiastical and theological matters, while glimmers of a more liberal attitude broke through among the Evangelicals, as seen in their position during the Leslie controversy in 1805.<sup>1</sup> But could a dividing line be drawn between the two parties in regard to their theological systems? Generally speaking Campbell was right in his observation that both "believed that theology was static, and that no further development was to be expected or desired."<sup>2</sup> If light could not be added, certainly heat could; and here we find a noticeable difference in the tendencies of the two parties. While Moderatism re-

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<sup>1</sup> Cunningham, op. cit., p. 433.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell, op. cit., p. 186.

garded enthusiasm in religion as "fanaticism," Evangelicalism gave more attention to emotional expression in religion. The "peculiar doctrines of Christianity," especially justification by faith, formed the content of most Evangelical preaching, while the Moderates insisted mainly upon the keeping of the commandments, their temper being more philosophical and ethical than theological.<sup>1</sup> Some of the Moderates went too far in "the sweet reasonableness of their moderation," and the more zealous of their ever-critical hearers had perhaps some reason in their complaints against sermons that were "a cauld clatter of morality," lacking in orthodox doctrine and apostolic zeal. In due course the Evangelical revival, connected with men like Andrew Thomson and Thomas Chalmers, breathed fresh power into Scottish religion.<sup>2</sup>

Wesley's Evangelical successors in England continued to have intercourse with their sympathizers from the north. The Haldane movement in Scotland, embodying many of the Evangelical tenets, had received its stimulus from Simeon of Cambridge. In 1798 Rowland Hill stormed through Scotland, deploring the "mangled" gospel which was for many Scottish preachers nothing but "a hungry system of bare-weight morality."<sup>3</sup> By pen, as well as by voice, the English Evangelicalism

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<sup>1</sup> William M. Taylor, The Scottish Pulpit from the Reformation to the Present Day, pp. 142 ff.

<sup>2</sup> G. M. Trevelyan, English Social History, p. 459.

<sup>3</sup> Cunningham, op. cit., p. 408.

exercised an influence in Scotland. Chalmers in his great spiritual crisis at Kilmany received much help from Wilberforce's Practical View, and later from such writers as Romaine, Doddridge, and Robert Hall. No less influence was exerted in Scotland from the writings of such Puritan divines as Howe, Owen, and Baxter, whose emphases were not too dissimilar to that of the Evangelicals.

The Evangelical movement was not without its intellectual defects. Governed more by emotion than by logic, Evangelicalism did little to develop the theology on which it was based, though it may be said to its credit that its emotional emphasis helped to break the fetters of mere intellectualism in religious faith. In many ways its leaders lagged far behind the culture of their age. Wesley drew lots or opened the Bible at random as a means of decision, and rejected as unscriptural the law of gravitation. Joseph Milner, whose Church History ranked with Scott's Commentary as important products of Evangelical scholarship, declared that "moral philosophy and metaphysics have ever been dangerous to religion," and he sought to dissuade his brethren from "deep researches into philosophy of any kind." Romaine held that the Greeks and Romans in regard to a knowledge of God were no better than Hottentots. Newton considered that the whole activity of unconverted man might be summed up under two heads of "mischief and vanity," and his contribution to the

Handel celebration of 1786 was a series of sermons in which he assailed The Messiah as a profanation of Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

A notable exception to this defect in Evangelicalism was Thomas Chalmers, whose effort to remove this intellectual blight on the Evangelical movement brought him recognitions by Glasgow University, Oxford University, the Royal Institute of Paris, and the Trustees of the Bridgewater Treatises. Such was his success that Masson concluded that "the Evangelicalism of Chalmers formed a stage in the religious history of Scotland."<sup>2</sup> He encouraged his students to despise no search for truth, in any field; and he never wearied in his effort to show that there was no conflict between science and religion. Yet, at times, he reflected the limitations of the Evangelical school, as was exemplified in the Preface to Sketches of Moral and Mental Philosophy, where he expressed the notion that intellectual progress consists in the isolated acquisitions of the mind and not in its widening and ripening through the interaction of ideas.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of exceptional cases, the quickened religious feeling and zealous philanthropic efforts, as a whole, were so much cut off from any living relation to the thought of the age and to theological inquiry, that little influence from these quarters upon the theology of the church could be expected.

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<sup>1</sup> Mathieson, op. cit., pp. 71--2.

<sup>2</sup> David Masson, Memoirs of Two Cities: Edinburgh and Aberdeen, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> SW, XII, 1--5.

To bring new life and movement into theology, a complete revolution in the minds of men was needed. The new mode of feeling needed as an ally a new mode of thought. As indicated by Pfleiderer,<sup>1</sup> this revolution in part was due to the direct influence of idealism as it had sprung from Romanticism. Though this revolution had but little effect on theological thought in Scotland during the first half of the nineteenth century, we should look briefly at its theological implications and note certain parallels with several "theological outcroppings" in Scotland.

#### IV. RISE OF ROMANTICISM

The source of this mental revolution at the beginning of the century must be sought in the nature of man. The cold understanding of the eighteenth century had starved the emotions and fettered the phantasy: these wronged sides of man's nature once more claimed their rights. "Retournons à la nature" was the watchword of the new movement, and Rousseau became its prophet. The cry found an echo in Herder and Goethe in Germany, in Wordsworth and Shelley in English poetry. Though in the beginning the movement had been marked by its anti-social and anti-historical tendency, contemporary events gave rise to a strong nationalism, which, in turn, when united with the philosophical thought of Hegel and Lessing, increased interest

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<sup>1</sup> Pfleiderer, op. cit., p. 304.

in history. The British impulse to revive interest in nationalism and history was given by Burke in politics and Sir Walter Scott in literature.<sup>1</sup>

So important was this new historical sense that Storr wrote that the "growing feeling for history. . . was the first and most important part of the legacy of the eighteenth century."<sup>2</sup> The historical spirit gave rise to the "historical method," a genetic approach to any fact or situation, which emphasized the study of doctrine from an historical perspective. The profoundest effect of the historical method on theology was perhaps the development of the science of Biblical criticism, modifying the conceptions of revelation and inspiration of Scripture. Germany was the scene of its early stages, and it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that Britain felt its impact. Thus, the assumption in the first half of the century was that in the Bible is to be found,

a revelation from God of such authority that even on matters belonging to the sphere of the natural sciences or of history its statements cannot be allowed to be incorrect without therefore impairing the claim of the whole to be, in the phrase hallowed by tradition, 'the Word of God.'<sup>3</sup>

From the Romantic movement there sprang the revival of religious and ecclesiastical taste and feeling. In Germany arose Schleiermacher, Neander, and Schlegel; in England

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> Storr, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Clement C. J. Webb, A Study of Religious Thought in England from 1850, p. 60.

Coleridge, Newman, and Pusey. As a true representative of Romanticism, Coleridge sought stability in German philosophy. Siding with the Evangelicals, though differing from their approach to the authenticity of Christian truth, he "maintained that Christianity is not a theory or speculation, but a life and a living process, that the proof of it therefore must consist in the inner personal experience of that life."<sup>1</sup> A colleague from Scotland was Thomas Carlyle, a disciple of Goethe, who deplored the "faint possible theism" that seeks a God here and there, and not there in the soul where He is. To him religion "is to found in every man as part of his spiritual constitution as a God-given faculty, enabling him to apprehend intuitively the Divine in the world and in human life, and to worship it in reverent obedience."<sup>2</sup> For the writings of both Coleridge and Carlyle, Chalmers showed no great relish, though he valued his personal acquaintance with both these eminent men and appreciated their Evangelical preferences.<sup>3</sup>

With few exceptions this new movement in thought and feeling made little impression on the theological climate of Scotland during Chalmers' day. But those exceptions were important, the most noteworthy being Thomas Erskine of Linlathen and John McLeod Campbell, the latter being finally

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<sup>1</sup> Pfeleiderer, op. cit., p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>3</sup> Memoirs, III, 160; IV, 505.

driven from the church as a "heretic." They rebelled against the narrow dogmatism and rigid externality of forensic Scottish Calvinism and made personal experience and the inner witness of the heart the starting-points of their theology. They effected a similar reconstruction of Christian doctrine as was made by Kant and Schleiermacher in Germany, though they appear to have reached their convictions in entire independence of German theology, by their own study of the Bible. Developing a strain of theology that had been emphasized in The Marrow of Modern Divinity (1646), Erskine expressed his convictions in The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel (1820) and became an apostle of the "Christian consciousness" in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> Campbell found the significance of the atonement being in the example of Jesus and the moral influence of His death. His views were set forth in The Nature of the Atonement, and its relation to Remission of Sins and Eternal Life (1856), designated by some as the most important contribution to dogmatics which British theology produced in the last century. In his trial before one of the church courts in 1831, he said in his defense:

If you can show me that anything I have taught is inconsistent with the Word of God, I shall give it up, and allow you to regard it as heresy. . . . If a Confession of Faith were something to stint or stop the Church's growth in light and knowledge, and to say, "Thus far shalt thou go

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<sup>1</sup> John Tulloch, Movements of Religious Thought in Britain during Nineteenth Century, p. 138.

and no further," then a Confession of Faith would be the greatest curse that ever befell a church. Therefore I distinctly hold that no minister treats the Confession of Faith right if he does not come with it, as a party, to the Word of God, and consent to stand or fall by the Word of God. In matters of doctrine no lower authority can be recognized than that of God.<sup>1</sup>

Though some years ahead of most of his Scottish contemporaries, Campbell was sounding the note that was to stir the church to a theological awakening later in the century. Both he and Erskine had a profound influence on the theological current of Britain, as well as of the continent. Even Chalmers did not escape the drift of the new current, and we shall observe later his relation to these men.

Thus, we end this very brief summary of the theological climate in Chalmers' day. As the climate of his own spiritual experience moved up the thermometer scale, so did the whole theological climate in which he was living. Rapid changes were being made, and even though Scottish thinkers tried to remain aloof from the change, they were bound to be influenced by, if not caught up in, the new current. If one dare attempt to give a summary statement it might be so expressed: When Chalmers walked on to the theological scene in Scotland, its climate was cold and lifeless; as he walked off, there were evidences of increasing warmth and of a new vitality in the Christian faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

## CHAPTER II

### APPROACH TO THEOLOGY

The most appropriate introduction to Chalmers' theology is a consideration of his own approach to the subject. What was the characteristic intellectual framework within which his thought was set? What trends in philosophy did he favor? What place did he give to the problem of knowledge? What were his views in the field of ethics? What distinction did he make between the different types of theology? What was his method of organizing theology? With such questions shall we be dealing in this chapter in preparation for our consideration of the theological thought of Thomas Chalmers.

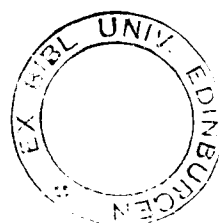
#### I. SCIENTIFIC FRAMEWORK

##### MATHEMATICAL FRAME OF MIND

As indicated in the last chapter, the first study that captured his interest was mathematics, and though the immediate stimulus thereto was given by Professor Thomas Brown, Chalmers' whole mental framework was most conducive to the pursuit of the exact sciences.<sup>1</sup> This interest in mathematics expanded into the fields of the physical sciences, especially

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, I, 14. See an interesting account of Chalmers' scientific correspondence with the Bishop of Nova Scotia in "The Royal Society Memoir of Dr. Chalmers," The Free Church Magazine, July 1849, p. 196.



chemistry and geology. His first attempts at teaching were restricted to the scientific field, and at Kilmany he amazed the parishioners with sermon illustrations and special lectures on scientific subjects. His spiritual awakening at Kilmany did not suppress this scientific bent of mind, but gradually pointed it in a new direction. New advancements in physical science he regarded as weapons in defense, rather than as weapons in defiance, of Christianity.<sup>1</sup> In his *Astronomical Discourses* he demonstrated how both telescope and microscope could serve Christian apologists as allies rather than as enemies. These scientific interests were quite indicative of a frame of mind that would inevitably give direction to his method of theology.

In both thought and action Chalmers was a lover of order, so methodically did he proceed in all his study, and so diligently did he adhere to a regular daily schedule. The taste for numerical arrangement was exhibited in the most insignificant actions and habits of his life. It even regulated every part of his toilet--down to the daily stropping of his razor.<sup>2</sup> The layout of his garden at Kilmany was geometric in its conception, with every plot and bed symmetrically formed.<sup>3</sup> With a mind operating in this mathematical fashion, it is not

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 608.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs, IV, 446.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., I, 191.

surprising that "Mr. Chalmers, the mathematician" blended with "Mr. Chalmers, the theologian" in producing his scheme of theology.

#### BACONIAN METHOD

Closely related to this mathematical bent of mind was the method of philosophy to which the Doctor pledged his fervent allegiance. "Give me a fact," he was reported as saying to a German theologian, "and I will plant myself upon that; but, as for your transcendental metaphysics, I have no footing on them, and no faith in them."<sup>1</sup> He never wearied of reiterating the importance of facts, and went so far as to say that "Philosophy consists altogether in the classification of individual facts--and that every such classification is founded on some common resemblance among the individuals."<sup>2</sup>

He expressed a strong preference for the inductive method, in contrast to the deductive. "Give me such a logic that takes cognizance of all which belongs to evidence, and will therefore demand a firm inductive basis for the settlement of every question which comes under the category of the

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<sup>1</sup> W. L. Alexander, Qualities and Worth of Thomas Chalmers, pp. 12--13. After a visit with Coleridge, Chalmers remarked to Edward Irving on the obscurity of the sage and said that he preferred to see all sides of an idea before taking it in. Irving replied: "Ha! You Scotchmen would handle an idea as a butcher handles an ox. For my part, I love to see an idea looming through the mist." Andrew L. Drummond, Edward Irving and His Circle, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> SW, XII, 17.

quid est or lies within the domain of observational truth."<sup>1</sup>

It was such an attitude that led Chalmers to say that he would believe anything on evidence.<sup>2</sup> In favor of this method Chalmers recognized its humble spirit of renouncing "all the systems and harmonies of the schoolmen"--hypothesis being replaced by observation.<sup>3</sup> Blended together in the inductive philosophy is "the strength of a full-grown understanding" and "the modesty of childhood."<sup>4</sup> "She promulgates all that is positively known; but she maintains the strictest silence and modesty about all that is unknown."<sup>5</sup> In several discussions he pointed to the advantage of a posteriori reasoning over a priori, and sometimes identified the latter with "human imagination," or with the "subtleties" of medieval scholasticism.<sup>6</sup>

He was fond of urging the use of the Baconian method in the science of theology, as well as in the science of nature. The theologian asks, What readest thou? The natural scientist asks, What findest thou?<sup>7</sup> The statements of Scripture correspond to the facts of science. Both are phenomena from which simple or ultimate principles are ascertained.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VIII, 562.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Murray, Nineteenth Century Unbelief, p. 6.  
Cf. SW, III, 31.

<sup>3</sup> Bridgewater Treatise, pp. 352--4.

<sup>4</sup> SW, V, 392.

<sup>5</sup> SW, III, 88.

<sup>6</sup> SW, V, 61, 63, 409.

<sup>7</sup> SW, VIII, 575.

<sup>8</sup> SW, VII, 292. Cf. Chalmers' statement that "the great object of philosophy is to ascertain the simple and ultimate principles, into which all the phenomena of nature may by analysis be resolved." SW, V, 172.

There is . . . a harmony of principle between that docility which is inculcated by modern science to the lessons of experience, and that docility which is inculcated by the gospel to the lessons of revelation. In the one there is the surrender of all theory to the evidence of observation, and hence a sound philosophy on the basis of ascertained facts. Altogether akin to this, in the other there is the surrender of all lofty imagination to the evidence of history, and hence a sound theology on the basis of ascertained facts also. . . . Had we a few at least of the friends of religion able to keep pace with the growing philosophy of the times, we should bear off from thence an augmented strength to the cause of the gospel, and a new accession to its glories.<sup>1</sup>

It was from Professor Robison that Chalmers had derived an admiration for the inductive method and an appreciation of its famous proponent.<sup>2</sup> Bacon was to him the master par excellence in the field of scientific investigation.<sup>3</sup> He was "the vigorous policeman who drove away Aristotle. . . ." <sup>4</sup> In Bishop Butler, Chalmers recognized the counterpart in the field of theology and often referred to him as "the Bacon of theology."<sup>5</sup> Bacon's maxim was: "Homo non est magister sed interpres naturae;" Butler's was: "Homo non est magister sed interpres scripturae."<sup>6</sup> Newton was also a master whom he admired, for his method rested on the principle of observational evidence

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 608--9.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs, I, 43.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VIII, 570 ff.

<sup>4</sup> NBR, p. 279.

<sup>5</sup> SW, VIII, 574. "On one occasion when some person present was animadverting upon the wealth of the Church of England, and gave, as an example of its over-abundance, the revenues of the see of Durham, the doctor exclaimed, with characteristic eagerness, 'Sir, if all that has been received for the bishopric of Durham since the foundation of the see were set down as payment for Butler's "Analogy," I should esteem it a cheap purchase.'" "The Royal Society Memoir of Dr. Chalmers," op. cit., p. 196.

<sup>6</sup> SW, VIII, 575.

and breathed the spirit of "The Modesty of True Science" (the title of Chalmers' second Astronomical Discourse, in which he eulogized the philosophic spirit of Newton).<sup>1</sup>

## II. PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE

Fundamental to his conception of the acquisition of knowledge, especially as it related to theology, was his distinction between the ethics and the objects of theology, or between the deontology and the ontology of it. The ethics determine the relations which exist within the subject, and are, practically speaking, common to all men, though in some cases lying dormant. The objects belong to the "philosophy of facts" and form the objective material with which the ethics assign moral relations. They are data derived from observation. The ethics are "ultimate facts of the human constitution, not communicated to us from external objects, but called forth into actual and sensible exercise by the contact as it were or excitement of these objects."<sup>2</sup> In natural philosophy there is an analogical distinction between the mathematics and the objects of the science.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear from these distinctions that Chalmers recognized both an objective and a subjective phase in the acquisition of knowledge. His most mature thought on the subject

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<sup>1</sup> SW, III, 26 ff. Cf. p. iv.

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

was set forth in his review of Morell's work on speculative philosophy, especially in his comparison of the views of Reid and Kant.

Following the general trend of Thomas Reid, Chalmers' first point was the "immediacy of our knowledge of the external world."<sup>1</sup> By only one step we come to a belief in the reality of external things--an instant belief of an external reality without the intervention of any image or process between the perceiving mind and the object perceived. This is a primary fact of the human constitution, he said, of which we have absolute assurance, though no account as to "how" can be given.<sup>2</sup>

In this connection there must be brought to bear a distinction which is too often neglected--that is, between the direct and the reflex operations of the mind.<sup>3</sup> The object of the former is something apart from the operation, while the latter's object is the operation itself. A sound operation of the mind is independent of an understanding or even a consciousness of the operation. Just as one may move a limb without understanding its structure or regulation, so one may think without a reflex view of the mental process.<sup>4</sup> "It is not more necessary to be conscious of the mind in the

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<sup>1</sup> NBR, p. 281

<sup>2</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>4</sup> SW, VI, 5 ff.

business of perceiving than to be conscious of the eye in the business of seeing. . . . We can perceive without thinking of the mind, as we can see without thinking of the eye."<sup>1</sup>

To confuse the reflex with the direct, or to overstress either, is a grave mistake, said Chalmers. He thought that such confusion of the subjective with the objective lay at the root of "the erratic movements of the German philosophy," and criticized Morell for not clarifying the issue.<sup>2</sup> He disapproved of Thomas Brown's emphasis on the importance of understanding the reflex operation, for he felt that it would lead to the conclusion that a study of mental science was prerequisite to a study of all other divisions of knowledge.<sup>3</sup> In addition, he also recognized a practical difficulty in connection with presenting the gospel message, when a description of the subjective process of response is treated as something that must be comprehended before the response can be made. "Instead of being plied with the broadly and conspicuously objective, he (a man receiving the gospel invitation) is perplexed among the subjective intricacies of a mental and metaphysical process."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NBR, p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 281--2. In a later edition of his work (1848), Morell answered Chalmers' charge by criticizing the Scotsman for forgetting the nature of the spontaneous development of the mind. "To suppose the subject actually lost in the object, would be to suppose the loss of a sense of personality." p. 186.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VI, 9.

<sup>4</sup> SW, VIII, 58.

The second general principle of Reid's to which he subscribed was that there are parts of our knowledge which are not the result of the observation of facts, but are beyond the bounds of such experience. Our knowledge is not made up wholly of ideas derived from sensation and reflection. Some most important ideas, such as space, time, substance, good and evil, quantity, number, and personal identity, may be considered as "simple and original notions."<sup>1</sup> Such "notions" Chalmers identified with Reid's "primary beliefs," and felt that the common sense philosopher was correct in his doctrine "that the senses were not the only inlets of our knowledge; but that there were other and higher principles of belief bound up with the interior conditions and structure of the mind itself, and existing apart from or anterior to all experience, although it may have been experience which at first evolved them."<sup>2</sup>

Frequently Chalmers set a posteriori reasoning over against a priori, casting a scornful glance at the latter. But when he came to the problem of knowledge, he realized that all truths could not and did not come through our observational faculties. In fact, one of his favorite premises was simply an a priori presupposition, though he never related it to such a description, nor to the conception of "innate ideas,"

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<sup>1</sup> NBR, p. 283.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 284.

for which he had no use.<sup>1</sup> We refer to "man's instinctive belief in the constancy of nature," to which he tenaciously held and frequently applied in his natural theology and Christian apologetics.<sup>2</sup> Man "in the first instance is furnished with this belief and feels it strongly, antecedent to experience. In the second instance, the experience does not add any further assurance to this primary and instinctive faith."<sup>3</sup>

Though he deviated from the teaching of Reid in certain points, Chalmers' thought developed more and more in conformity to the common sense school. He was fond of Beattie's Truth,<sup>4</sup> and though he never was drawn to Dugald Stewart in his student days, he later endorsed the general line of his approach.<sup>5</sup> His slight acquaintance with German thought, and that coming late in life, prevented his recognizing its basic variance from the Scottish school, and he regarded the philosophy of Kant in substantial identity with common sense philosophy, clad in a new garb or an altered nomenclature.<sup>6</sup>

### III. ETHICAL BASIS

As Professor of Moral Philosophy Chalmers restricted

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 57.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VI, 26 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Memoirs, I, 44.

<sup>5</sup> SW, VI, 21 ff.

<sup>6</sup> NBR, pp. 283--4. Cf. James McCosh, The Scottish Philosophy, p. 404.

the subject largely to the science of ethics--"the philosophy of duty." He insisted that moral philosophy be not confounded with mental philosophy. The latter belongs to the quid est, and the former to the quid oportet.

My knowledge that such a purpose or passion exists, is one thing; my judgment of its character is another. In the one case, it is viewed historically as a fact; in the other it is viewed morally as a vice or a virtue. In the one aspect it belongs to mental; in the other, to moral science--two sciences distinct from each other in nature, and which ought never to have been so blended, as to have been treated like one and the same science in our course of philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

In the opening chapter of his Institutes entitled "Preliminary Ethics," Chalmers gave a summary of the truths he deemed most significant. The objective nature of virtue was clearly set forth:

We hold that morality has a stable, inherent, and essential rightness in itself, and that anterior to or apart from, whether the tacit or expressed will of any being in the universe--that it had a subsistence and a character before that any creatures were made who could be the subjects of a will or a government at all. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Virtue is not dependent on the will of God. God is no more the Creator of virtue than He is of truth. Virtue has existed from all eternity in His character as a concrete and substantive reality. "It is not the will of God which determines His nature; but the nature of God which determines His will. . . . Virtue is not right because God wills it, but God wills

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<sup>1</sup> SW, XII, 8. Cf. VI, 10, 17.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 14.

it because it is right."<sup>1</sup>

Though the Doctor gave no formal critique of the different systems of ethics, he did express disapproval of the utilitarian view. "Virtue has a rightness and obligation in itself apart from its usefulness."<sup>2</sup> In a utilitarian scheme God may be excluded and morality become the mere product of human experience.<sup>3</sup> Chalmers recognized that his emphasis on the design argument in natural theology was vulnerable to anti-utilitarian attacks, and in the Institutes he responded to criticisms of his Bridgewater Treatise by affirming that even though morality has a definite usefulness, it is in the actual conjunction of the two categories of usefulness and righteousness that we have an "experimental demonstration of the regimen under which we live being indeed a regimen of virtue."<sup>4</sup>

He affirmed the presence among men of "natural virtue," which, though constituting an admirable object to the eyes of the world, has no religion in it, since "there be in it no reference of the mind to the will of God."<sup>5</sup> Whenever the "religious principle" takes possession of the mind, it animates this natural or social virtue with a new spirit,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 20. Such a criticism appeared in The Westminster Review, January 1834, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> SW, IV, 164.

giving to it a religious significance.<sup>1</sup>

If you do what is virtuous because God tells you so, then, and then only, do you give us a fair example of the authority of religion over your practice. But if you do it merely because it is lovely, because it is honourable, or because it is a fine moral accomplishment, --I will not be behind my neighbours in giving the testimony of my admiration; but I cannot see why God will reward it in the capacity of your master, when His service was not the principle of it. . . .<sup>2</sup>

In connection with this division of virtue into social and religious, Chalmers made a distinction between the duties of perfect and imperfect obligation. In our relationship to God we are always under perfect obligation; in our relationship to our fellowmen there are certain values, such as justice, which place us under perfect obligation, and certain others, such as benevolence, which place us under imperfect.<sup>3</sup>

One of Chalmers' "first principles" was that "for any act or dispositions to be susceptible of a moral designation, whether of blame or approval, the will must have to do with it."<sup>4</sup> From this principle he showed that since the will regulates the attention, then man is responsible for his belief.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the emotions become subject to moral designation, for mediately the attention directs the emotions. Such a process involves direction given to the attention by the volition,

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<sup>1</sup> SW, III, 136--7.

<sup>2</sup> PW, VI, 174--5.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VII, 24 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

and then the inevitable response of thought and consequently of emotion.

Actions are voluntary in themselves, in that the mind can will them directly into being. Emotions, though not voluntary in themselves, are so far voluntary in their proximate or immediate causes--in that the mind . . . can will those ideas into its presence by which the emotions are awakened.<sup>1</sup>

#### IV. PRACTICAL EMPHASIS

##### THEOLOGICAL NOMENCLATURE

In the early days of his ministry Chalmers recorded in his Journal that "the phraseology of the old writers must be given up for one more accommodated to the present age."<sup>2</sup> His reference was probably to the scholastics, for he frequently condemned their systems and their terminology. Anything tinged with scholasticism was an abhorrence to him. On one occasion he said:

Another ground of aversion which we have to the term is that it sounds scholastically; and might therefore have, at least the apparent effect, of involving in the hieroglyphical mysticism of a strange tongue, that which ought to be the object of most familiar and intelligent contemplation.<sup>3</sup>

It was for a return to "scriptural language" that Chalmers contended. The non-scriptural language of the scholastics had arisen to meet the anti-scriptural doctrine clothed in

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<sup>1</sup> Bridgewater Treatise, p. 396. Cf. p. 361; SW, VII, 44--5.

<sup>2</sup> Journal entry, 7 March 1813, Memoirs, I, 323.

<sup>3</sup> SW, XII, 83.

anti-scriptural language. Citing the Athanasius--Arius controversy as an example, he agreed with Bishop Bull that the "trickery of the Arians" necessitated the Nicene phraseology's being non-scriptural. Thus it was that there arose a transition from the scriptural language of a theologia didactica to the scholastic language of a theologia elenctica.<sup>1</sup> But the Doctor optimistically looked to the day when "God's own truths expressed in God's own language will form the universal creed of enlarged and harmonized and happy Christendom."<sup>2</sup>

Though at times his pen followed the well-worn tread of scholastic phraseology, he was successful in imparting a certain novelty and freshness to theological expression and Biblical exposition. It is too much to say, as several have done,<sup>3</sup> that Chalmers contributed a new theological nomenclature to Scottish thought, but one needs only to read his sermons and lectures and to note the response given them by the public to conclude that he was quite successful in accommodating his language to his own time.

#### THEOLOGY FROM CHAIR AND PULPIT

Chalmers frequently urged his students to consider carefully the distinction between the mode in which theology

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VIII, 255.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>3</sup> James Bryce, Ten Years of the Church of Scotland, I, 247; MacPhail's Edinburgh Ecclesiastical Journal, September, 1846, pp. 78--9.

should be learned from the chair and taught from the pulpit. In the divinity hall you fix and ascertain what the doctrines of Christianity are; in the pulpit you declare them. The truth of theology is the final term in the former, but the initial term in the latter. The professor points toward conviction, the preacher beyond conviction to action. "The proof of the doctrine being that which is chiefly exhibited in the one--the practical uses of the doctrine being that which is chiefly expounded and enforced in the other."<sup>1</sup> A second distinction is that the professor deals in theoretical understanding, while the preacher deals in practical fulfillment. The one instructs men so as to make them comprehend the scheme of Christianity; the other influences men in such a way as to make them Christians.<sup>2</sup> And a third distinction is that the professor tends to be more general, the preacher more specific.<sup>3</sup>

Though he stressed the importance of such distinctions, he realized that they were not absolute. His own lectures were often quite sermonic and very practical, and testimonies from some of his students indicate that his classroom was a place of real spiritual enrichment. On the other hand, he recognized that there were times "when, to ward off some menacing heresy, the polemic arm must be lifted even in the

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VIII, 237.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 246 ff.

house of God to quell the mischief, and the work of exposing it be the burden of many a Sabbath ministration."<sup>1</sup> The danger from which he guarded his students was using the pulpit as an apologetic sounding-board. To an ordinary congregation polemics usually do more harm than good, so we must beware lest they be to our spiritual loss.<sup>2</sup> Relating this distinction to our theological nomenclature, the Doctor said: "I cannot too earnestly or repeatedly insist upon it, that your business in the pulpit is to be expounders of the scriptural and not expounders of the scholastic theology."<sup>3</sup>

In comparing Chalmers' own lectures and sermons, we observe that the latter move along deductive lines, while the former proceed inductively, exemplifying his adherence to the favorite Baconian method. He gave a fitting description of his classroom presentation when he defined a pure theologia didactica as that which "institutes a survey and comparison of all the Bible passages which relate to a given subject, and out of them it constructs a generalized expression of the truth common to them all, which truth thus announced, and as nearly as may be in Scriptural language, forms one of its articles."<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, his sermons were expositions of only one truth, or occasionally of two truths balancing

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 349. Cf. pp. 256, 549.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 338.

each other. In the words of Thomas Carlyle, a sermon of Chalmers was "the triumphant on-rush of one idea with its satellites and supporters."<sup>1</sup> As the great preacher Robert Hall expressed it, "Dr. Chalmers moves on hinges, not on wheels; there is incessant motion, but no progress."<sup>2</sup>

#### ORDER OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

As indicated in an earlier part of this chapter, Chalmers' pursuits in the field of physical and social sciences were theologically centered: he used his findings in science to elucidate and illustrate his findings in theology. In doing so, he turned what was frequently regarded as ammunition against theology into auxiliaries in her support. In spite of the current attacks on Christian theology from philosophers and scientists, Chalmers was confident that "Theology has an independent domain of her own, where, safe in her own inherent strength and in the munitions by which she is surrounded, she can afford to be at peace with her neighbours, and, free from all apprehension or envy, can rejoice in the prosperity of all sciences."<sup>3</sup>

With such an attitude toward theology's relation to

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<sup>1</sup> James Anthony Froude, editor, Reminiscences by Thomas Carlyle, I, 161. Cf. Sir Archibald Alison's statement in William Law Mathieson, Church and Reform in Scotland, 1797--1843, pp. 300--1.

<sup>2</sup> George J. Davis, Successful Preachers, p. 467.

<sup>3</sup> SW, XII, 3.

other studies, New College's first Principal worked out a scheme of theological education, which he believed to be most conducive to the proper training of Christian ministers. There was a preparatory study of natural philosophy, followed by moral and mental philosophy, with a selection of material from these fields that had a particular bearing on theology.<sup>1</sup> Natural theology should form the first definitely theological course of study, and following in order of succession there should be lectures on the evidences for the truth of Christianity, the inspiration of Scripture, and a general view of Scripture criticism and systematic theology. Having prepared himself largely with the credentials of Christianity, the student is ready for a study of the contents of Christianity, comprising lectures in systematic theology and pastoral theology.<sup>2</sup>

#### METHOD OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

The method of presenting the doctrines of Christianity was even more important to the Professor than a proper order of the different theological courses. He recognized that the usual method proceeded chronologically in order of divine administration, beginning with the Godhead and concluding with eschatology; in rejecting this method, he referred to

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VIII, 533 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs, IV, 218--9.

its a priori spirit and its untimely treatment of such doctrines as the Trinity at the beginning of the course.<sup>1</sup> Organizing theology around the Westminster Standards or the Thirty-Nine Articles was not acceptable to him. He found no textbook whose order was entirely satisfactory, so he recommended textbooks for outside reading and gave supplementary prelections on certain ones.<sup>2</sup>

The method he adopted for his regular lectures was the "anthropological," proceeding chronologically in order of human inquiry. Out of the darkness and probabilities of natural religion, man is prompted to inquire further.<sup>3</sup> He may become convinced of the truth of Christianity by an examination of its credentials, but usually conviction arises out of observing its harmony with natural religion and finding in it the answer to the distress and difficulties previously experienced. Thus, the proper order of presenting the subject-matter of Christianity is: (1) the disease for which the gospel remedy is provided; (2) the nature of the gospel remedy; (3) the extent of the gospel remedy; (4) the doctrine of the Trinity, and the persons of the Trinity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Recommended were Butler's Analogy, Paley's Evidences, Hill's Lectures, Horne's Critical Knowledge and Study of Holy Scripture. SW, V, 579 ff. Prelections were given on all but the last. In commenting on the use of Hill's work, he said that the merit lay not in its content, but in its order. "This is a great, perhaps the greatest, recommendation of a textbook." SW, VIII, 261.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VII, 14.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 1 ff.

Underlying his preference for this order was his attitude toward theology as "a science whose initial elements we cannot pluck from the dark recesses of the eternity that is past, and whose ultimate conclusions we cannot follow to the like dark and distant recesses of the eternity before us, and which we can therefore only explore to the confines of the light that has been made to shine around us."<sup>1</sup> Chalmers recognized the consistency of his order with the Baconian method in science, starting with the objects of phenomena and from them deriving the principles. In addition, he listed three reasons why the subject of human depravity should precede that of the gospel remedy in systematic theology: (1) Christianity is primarily a remedial or restorative system; (2) study of the subjective is nearer and lies within the domain of our own immediate consciousness; (3) it is usually the first topic that engages the inquirer at the beginning of religious earnestness.<sup>2</sup>

From the time of his own conversion Chalmers showed a preference for this method, which is reflected in many of his sermons as well as in his lectures.<sup>3</sup> His order had somewhat of a parallel in the Heidelberg Catechism,<sup>4</sup> though there is

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 318--322. Cf. VII, 356, 511--2.

<sup>3</sup> In the spring of 1812 he preached a series of sermons, following this order of subjects: inflexibility of divine justice, sin in relation to this justice and state into which it places us, the remedy for this condition. Memoirs, I, 348.

<sup>4</sup> The three divisions of this Catechism are: "Of Man's Misery," "Of Man's Redemption," "Of Thankfulness."

no evidence of influence from this source. There may have been a Pascalian influence, derived from his sick-bed experience,<sup>1</sup> but he never suggested this as a source. A more likely influence was his admiration of Paul's order in Romans, suggested in his Introductory Lecture on that epistle.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most probable reason, though, for adopting such a procedure was his strong emphasis on the practical--it followed the general pattern of his own spiritual experience and seemed the most effective order for systematizing Christian truth for the intellectual and spiritual understanding of his students.

#### ADAPTABILITY AND APPEAL

Whether from pulpit or chair, Chalmers was insistent that in the presentation of Christian truth adaptability to the local situation is most important. Saint Paul was the example to which he often appealed. "In the reasonings of the Apostle Paul, we cannot fail to observe, how studiously he accommodates his arguments to the pursuits or principles or prejudices of the people whom he was addressing."<sup>3</sup>

Another phase of adaptability he emphasized for the preacher. "In all our discussions of the different questions in theology, we have ever rejoiced when, instead of a merely intellectual dogma, a topic, perhaps, of learned controversy,

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, I, 152.

<sup>2</sup> SW, I, 1 ff.

<sup>3</sup> SW, III, 7. Cf. IV, 280 ff.; CW, VII, 340--1.

we could perceive any opening whatever by which it might be turned to an object of plain and practical application."<sup>1</sup> Both in the selection of themes and in their presentation, the great preacher carried out this practical emphasis. In the preface to a volume of his sermons, he justified such topics as "Predestination" and "The Sin against the Holy Ghost" with this statement:

These are topics of a highly speculative character, in the system of Christian Doctrine, which it is exceedingly difficult to manage, without interesting the curiosity rather than the conscience of the reader. And yet, it is from their fitness of application to the conscience, that they derive their chief right to appear in a volume of Sermons; and I should not have ventured any publication upon either of these Doctrines, did I not think them capable of being so treated as to subserve the great interests of practical godliness.<sup>2</sup>

"The more practical--the better," was his maxim. "It is not vulgarizing Christianity to bring it down to the very humblest occupations of human life. It is, in fact, dignifying human life, by bringing it up to the level of Christianity."<sup>3</sup>

His own congregations were composed of all levels of intellectual endowment, and to his students Chalmers stressed the importance of presenting Christian truth in such a way as to make it appeal to all classes of people. A scholarly ministry was needed, not only to meet heretical attacks, but to gain the support of the intellectual contingent of the popu-

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VIII, 234.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Chalmers, Sermons Preached in St. John's Church, Glasgow, pp. vii--viii.

<sup>3</sup> SW, III, 182.

lation.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the common man must not be forgotten:

The odi profanum vulgus of the Egyptian priesthood, who, wrapt in hieroglyphic mystery, forbade the access of all but the initiated to their temple, is not more hateful to my eyes than is that freezing interdict of certain doctors or dignitaries, which, if given way to, would lock up the bread of life from the multitude, and lay obstruction on the free circulation among our streets and lanes of those waters of life which are for the healing of the people.<sup>2</sup>

The appeal of Christian truth should be not only to all men, but also to the whole man. It had overwhelmed Chalmers in toto, and he was zealous that its appeal to others should attract both their minds and their hearts. He sensed among certain intellectual leaders of his day a suspicion of emphasizing the emotional element in religion, and to allay such an attitude was the purpose of his sermon on "Defence of Religious Enthusiasm."<sup>3</sup> A similar thought was expressed in his comments on contemporary German thought:

We do not need to take down the framework of our existing orthodoxy, whether in theology or in science. All we require is that it shall become an animated framework, by the breath of a new life being infused into it. Ours has been most truly denounced as an age of formalism: But to mend this, we do not need to exchange our formulas, only to quicken them; nor to quit the ground of our common sense for baseless speculations; nor to substitute the Divine Idea of Fichte for a personal and living God; nor to adopt for our Saviour a mere embodied and allegorized perfection, and to give up the actual and historical Jesus Christ of the New Testament. . . . What we want is that the very system of doctrine which we now have shall come to us not in word only but in power. As things

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 608; VIII, 582.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VIII, 555.

<sup>3</sup> PW, VI, 204 ff.

stand at present, our creeds and confessions have become effete; and the Bible a dead letter; and that orthodoxy which was at one time the glory, by withering into the inert and the lifeless, is now the shame and the reproach of all our Churches. . . . It is not by grafting the German philosophy on the gospel of Jesus Christ,-- nor by overlaying its literal facts or literal doctrines with the glosses and allegories of German rationalism,-- it is not thus that we shall be able to vindicate, far less to magnify, our religion in the eyes of the world. Without the mutilation of it by one jot or one tittle, we have but to fill and follow up that Gospel, to embody it entire in our own personal history, turning its precepts into a law, and its faith into a living principle.<sup>1</sup>

To resurrect a dead creed, to enliven a formalistic theology, was his aim. With "thoughts that breathe and words that burn,"<sup>2</sup> he expounded his theology,

Which cut down through the middle,  
Shews a heart blood-tinctured with a veined humanity.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NBR, pp. 326--8.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs, III, 229.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from "Notices" of Chalmers' Posthumous Works, p. 3, inserted at end of Posthumous Works, VIII, 1849.

## CHAPTER III

### NATURAL THEOLOGY

As an ardent student of natural theology and a zealous leader of Evangelicalism, Chalmers was an unusual combination for his day. The roots of this interest in natural theology can be traced to his student days when he clearly showed a preference for mathematics and the physical sciences. His continual interest in these subjects was revealed in references in his own teaching and preaching, though after his Kilmany awakening primary consideration was given to the "peculiar doctrines of Christianity." He continued to recognize the importance of the minister's making an intelligent approach to new discoveries in the scientific field. So convinced was he of the need of correlating the advancements of science with his system of theology that in 1844 he wrote: "They who would divorce Theology from Science, or Science from Theology, are, in effect if not intention, the enemies of both."<sup>1</sup>

At one period in his life Chalmers deviated from this line of thought. In his article on "Christianity" published in 1813 he had little use for natural theology and manifested little interest in relating the findings of science with the findings of theology. In concluding his apologetic presen-

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Chalmers, "The Political Economy of the Bible," The North British Review, November, 1844, p. 3.

tation he wrote:

Tell us a single discovery, which has thrown a particle of light on the details of the divine administration. Tell us a single truth in the whole field of experimental science, which can bring us to the moral government of the Almighty any other road than his own revelation. . . . They (modern sciences) all serve to exalt the Deity, but they do not contribute a single iota to the explanation of its purposes.<sup>1</sup>

After severe criticisms from several writers on his strong defense of the historical evidences to the neglect of the experimental, he began to re-evaluate his position; after a few years he began to stress the experimental rather than the historical and to give natural theology a larger place in his whole scheme.

When he began his lectures in moral philosophy at St. Andrews, the second half of the course dealt with natural theology, in which he attempted to "demonstrate the existence and the character of a God so far as the light of nature" would carry him.<sup>2</sup> A revised set of these lectures opened his course as Professor of Divinity at Edinburgh, and in 1836 they were published as the first two volumes of his Collected Works. In 1833 his Bridgewater Treatise had included a portion of this more extended work. His maturest thought on the whole subject is contained in his Institutes of Theology, compiled during the last six years of his life and published posthumously; and his latest opinions on the subject

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<sup>1</sup> "Christianity," pp. 394--5.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs, III, 55--6.

appear in his review of Morell's volume on European philosophy, written a few months before his death.<sup>1</sup> Other sources for examining his natural theology include his lectures on Butler's Analogy and a selection of sermons containing remarks on the subject, such as "God Is Love," "Heaven a Character and not a Locality," "On the Constancy of God in His Works an Argument for the Faithfulness of God in His Word," and "On the Consistency between the Efficacy of Prayer and the Uniformity of Nature."

#### I. THE NATURE OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

In his natural theology Chalmers held to a universal knowledge of God. Acknowledging the main object of theology to be God, he credited to all nations a sort of "twilight glimmering," "for in no age or country of the world . . . did the objects of theology lie hidden under an entire and unqualified darkness."<sup>2</sup> He even went so far as to suggest a knowledge of God necessary for man to be man. "For man not to know of a God, he has only to sink beneath the level of our common nature."<sup>3</sup> Yet he recognized that there are men who do not acknowledge the existence of God. Distinguishing be-

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<sup>1</sup> This review in The North British Review, February 1847, was a publication of a series of lectures based on his reflections from reading J. D. Morell's An Historical and Critical View of the Speculative Philosophy of Europe in the Nineteenth Century.

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

tween disbelief and unbelief, he separated these men into two groups: the antitheist and the atheist, or in Flint's terminology, dogmatic atheist and skeptical atheist.<sup>1</sup> The antitheist claims to have proven that God does not exist; the atheist only claims that it is not proven that He exists. The antitheistic position Chalmers dismissed as philosophically unsound, for "to be able to say that there is no God, we must walk the whole expanse of infinity, and ascertain by observation, that such vestiges (that are given of His power and His presence) are to be found nowhere."<sup>2</sup> With the atheist he was more patient and accepted his position as the point from which to begin the argument for God, demanding from the atheist only a willingness to entertain the question that there is a God.

This universal knowledge of God cannot be apprehended directly: the process he regarded as inferential. With an empirical limitation on his conception of epistemology, Chalmers was certain "that we can take no direct cognizance of Him by our faculties whether of external or internal observation."<sup>3</sup> The spirituality of God's nature, along with other attributes such as His eternity and His omnipresence, places Him beyond the reach of our direct cognizance, and He stands distinguished from all other knowledge by the peculiar ave-

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Flint, Anti-Theistic Theories, p. 444.

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 28.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

nues through which the knowledge of Him is conveyed to us. That our knowledge of God is inferential Chalmers often re-affirmed, but occasionally he seemed to slip from this strong emphasis in order to allow the possibility that among all men there may be "a certain immediate and irresistible sense of God." Even if there be innate thoughts and impressions of God, it is no mysticism that confirms them, and Chalmers felt himself, together with all philosophers and common people, to be on much sounder ground in regarding our knowledge of God as a matter of inference.<sup>1</sup>

In order to dissipate the obscurity to which this contemplation might lead, Chalmers made the distinction between what he called the ethics of theology and the objects of theology--a distinction parallel to one in natural philosophy between the mathematics of the science and the objects of the science. The objects of theology are those substantive beings and historical events which come within the category of quid est, having reference to the ontology of the science. The ethics of theology have reference to our obligation or response to these objects, coming within the category of quid oportet and denoting the deontology of the science.<sup>2</sup> By way of illustration, he conceived of a certain relation between two men, one of whom had conferred a kindness on the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 168--9.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 37--9.

other. The gratitude toward the benefactor is the ethic; the benefactor is the object. Or in another illustration, he imagined an inhabitant of Jupiter sending him a communication. Concerning this object of attention Chalmers wrote, "I have a moral nature, a law within my heart, which already tells me how I should respond to this communication."<sup>1</sup> The objects of theology, as well as every other science, are ascertained by observation, and the relations that subsist between these objects are assigned by its ethics. But whence did our knowledge of the ethics originate? Here Chalmers called upon an intuitive principle, which he often deprecated, to reinforce a weakness of his a posteriori approach. These ethics of theology he thought of as principles which "are ultimate facts in the human constitution, not communicated to us from external objects, but called forth into actual and sensible exercise by the contact as it were and excitement of these objects."<sup>2</sup> Illustrating and confirming this distinction was a similar one by Doctor Whately between the truths men receive by information and those received by instruction.

By the use of this distinction Chalmers tried to correlate his natural theology with the Biblical position of the depravity of man. When total degeneracy and total darkness

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

are ascribed to man, the distinction between the objects and ethics of theology has not been deeply probed into:

There is no such blindness in respect to moral distinctions that there is in respect to objects placed beyond the domain of observation, and holding substantive existence in a spiritual and unseen world. . . . We can imagine the latter (objects of theology) to be a total darkness, while the former is only a twilight obscurity. . . . It is thus we understand the Apostle when speaking of the work of the law being written in the hearts of the Gentiles, and of their being a law unto themselves. . . . In this passage he concedes to nature the knowledge, if not of the objects of theology, at least of the ethics.<sup>1</sup>

This universal knowledge of God, which comes to man largely by inference, places all men under an obligation to God. A duty is laid upon men by the conception of the probability or even the imagination of His existence, and it is morally incumbent on all to follow out even "the faintest incipient notices of a Deity."<sup>2</sup> "In the utter destitution, for the present, of any argument, or even semblance of argument, that a God is--there is, perhaps, a certain duteous movement which the mind ought to take, on the bare suggestion that a God may be."<sup>3</sup> Illustrating by analogy to a human situation, he argued that when a man suffering from extreme destitution is translated all at once into a state of sufficiency by an anonymous donation, he is under an obligation at least to seek for knowledge of the

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 20--2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

benefactor. The ethics of the situation come into play anterior to the clear view of any of its objects; and when man admits even the possibility of a Divine Benefactor, in connection with such obvious benefits as the air that he breathes and the light in which he walks, he places himself under a solemn and imperative duty.

Regarding these, not as proofs, but in the humble light of presumptions for a God, they are truly enough to convict us of foulest ingratitude--if we go not forth in quest of a yet unknown, but at least possible or likely benefactor. . . . The prima facie evidence for a God may not be enough to decide the question, but it should at least decide man to entertain the question. . . . Man is not to blame, if an atheist, because of the want of proof. But he is to blame, if an atheist, because he has shut his eyes.<sup>1</sup>

This obligatory aspect of natural theology makes all men fit subjects of "judicial cognizance" by God. No man is without some elements of a moral nature, and the peculiar character of each can be seen from the way in which it responds to the manifestation of the Deity. Though it be true that the more clearly we know God, the more closely does the obligation of godliness rest upon us--yet, "there is as much of a rudimentary and remaining theology in the world as to make all men the fit subjects of a moral reckoning, and so of being judicially dealt with for their treatment of a God."<sup>2</sup> A further application of his obligation principle Chalmers made in regard to religious education of children. Beginning with

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 34--5. Cf. VII, 58--63.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 58--9.

childhood and reaching on through successive stages of religious scholarship which is anterior to a well-grounded belief in the objects of religion. At a very early age the aspirations and inquiries of a child are prompted by a sense of duty even to the yet unknown God. "It might not make him a believer, but it ought to make him an inquirer--and in this indifference of his there is the very essence of sin--though it be against a God who is unknown."<sup>1</sup> Chalmers also regarded this principle of obligation as an encouragement to the teacher of religion who finds an introduction for his topic even in the minds of people in the lowest state of both moral and intellectual debasement. The antecedency of the ethics, not to the conception, but at least to the belief of the objects of theology, places all men under the jurisdiction of this obligatory principle and prepares them for receiving the content of natural theology.

## II. THE CONTENT OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

Before entering upon an exposition of his own system, Chalmers attempted to expose objectional features in the reasoning of Samuel Clarke, regarded in eighteenth century Britain as a leading advocate of the a priori argument for the being and attributes of God. Clarke did not start from a concrete experience: he attempted to show that a knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 41.

of God is strictly demonstrable from the most uncontestable principles of reason. His problem was metaphysical and his maxim was the Law of Contradiction--that whatever is stated about Being must not be a contradictory statement. Of Being certain predicates are true: unity, self-existence, self-causation, necessity. Since these are not true of finite beings, then we know of a Being before we turn to the world of finites. This non-finite Being is God. The infinity, eternity, omnipotence, and goodness of God he posits by his a priori method as necessary conditions of His existence; only on intelligence and liberty does he resort to the world and proceed a posteriori.<sup>1</sup>

Chalmers placed himself in the company of his former teacher, Thomas Brown, in opposing Clarke's approach to natural theology. His first criticism was that Clarke confounded a physical with a logical or mathematical necessity in the existent state of actual nature:

He proceeds all along on the assumption that there is no necessity in the substantive existence of things, unless the denial of that existence involves a logical contradiction in terms. . . . He denies the necessary existence of matter, merely because we can conceive it not to exist. . . . The logical is made to be identical with or made to be the test and the measure of, the actual or the physical necessity. The one is confounded with the other, and this we hold to be the first fallacy of the a priori argument.<sup>2</sup>

His second criticism was aimed at Clarke's contention that

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<sup>1</sup> Clarke's arguments are found in his A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God, I, 1--126.

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 54--5.

space and time are conditions of existence and are therefore infinite. A fallacy of the a priori argument lay at the transition from the necessary existence of space and time to the necessary existence of God; for, according to Chalmers, both space and time could be conceived without a substance of which they were but the attributes and did not necessarily imply a substantive Being to which they belonged. The whole a priori approach he discredited as "dead weight upon the cause" and expressed "all partialities for the argumentum a posteriori."<sup>1</sup>

A certain a posteriori approach Chalmers thought invalid and meaningless. He saw little force in reasoning from the existence of matter as an effect to the necessity of a cause behind it, and thus discounted any trust in the cosmological argument for God. Only in observing design in the effect can one be justified in inferring a Creator, said Chalmers.<sup>2</sup>

#### EVIDENCE FOR GOD FROM DESIGN IN EXTERNAL NATURE

In his writings on natural theology, Chalmers made no attempt to develop the logical steps of an argument for God from design; his treatment dealt more with specific difficulties that had been pointed to in the traditional teleo-

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 61--4.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 71--3.

logical system. He made no attempt to delve into the systematic steps involved in the argument, though he did seem at times to sense the tautology of the generally accepted formula, "design implies a designer." His main concern was not with "metaphysical obscurities" nor with logical abstractions, but with practical difficulties in understanding, and obvious evidences in supporting, this approach to natural theology.

As a working postulate, he attempted to show that the present order of things had a beginning. For the sake of his argument he needed to affirm not the non-eternity of matter, but only the non-eternity of "its present subsistent economy." Paley had supported this affirmation by the general proposition that "wherever we meet with an organic structure where there is the adaptation of complicated means to an end, the cause for its being must be found out of itself and apart from itself."<sup>1</sup> Discarding this statement as "metaphysically obscure," Chalmers resorted to his empirical preference and made the general observation that the present system of things contains within itself the elements of decay.

It is from what we behold of this process at present, and in transitu, that we infer the certainty of its future termination. But with equal confidence might we infer the certainty of a past commencement. For if it never had a beginning, then at all events it could not have subsisted to the present day. . . .<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 95.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 80.

For ammunition to defend his proposition he drew from the science of geology, especially the findings of Cuvier.<sup>1</sup> Geological students had shown that there had been rises and falls of certain distinct and successive economies of nature on the face of our globe. Revolutions in physical and natural processes must have taken place and at "each new catastrophe old races must have perished--and the world been stocked with new races distinct and diverse from the former ones."<sup>2</sup> Accepting the prevalent position of contemporary naturalists that spontaneous generation and transmutation of the species were impossible, and knowing "of no power in all the magazines of nature that could have originated the new races . . . which now replenish our world,"<sup>3</sup> Chalmers saw in their origin a most palpable evidence for a "Creative Interposition." With such evidence for a beginning of certain species of animal life present in our world today, he felt justified in resting this postulate of his design argument on an empirical basis.

Chalmers' recognition of a possible friendship between theology and the infant science of geology was a divergence from the suspicion or enmity felt by most of his colleagues. The prevailing attitude among orthodox theologians of the Evangelical school was one of denunciation, expressed by

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<sup>1</sup> See Chalmers' review of Cuvier's Essay on the Theory of the Earth in The Edinburgh Christian Instructor, April 1814, pp. 261--74.

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 140.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VII, 84.

these lines from Cowper:

Some drill and bore  
The solid earth: and from the strata there  
Extract a register by which they prove  
That He who made it and revealed its date  
To Moses, was mistaken in its age.<sup>1</sup>

Opposing this view, the journalist, Hugh Miller, recommended a form of "Uniformitarianism," interpreting the "days" of Genesis as expressions of vast periods of time rather than as twenty-four-hour days.<sup>2</sup> Chalmers did not go quite so far, but in accepting a form of "Catastrophism," he was the first Scottish clergyman, said Hanna, who, yielding to the evidence in favor of a much higher antiquity being assigned to the earth than had previously been conceived, suggested the manner in which such a scientific faith could be harmonized with the Genesis narrative.<sup>3</sup> As early as 1804 he had said in a lecture at St. Andrews:

By referring the origin of the globe to a higher antiquity than is assigned to it by the writings of Moses, it has been said that geology undermines our faith in the inspiration of the Bible, and in all the animating prospects of immortality which it unfolds. This is a false alarm. The writings of Moses do not fix the antiquity of the globe. If they fix anything at all, it is only the antiquity of the species.<sup>4</sup>

This approach enabled him to accept the testimony of historical record, particularly the Genesis account of creation, as further evidence for the commencement of the present

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<sup>1</sup> William Cowper, "The Task," Poems of William Cowper, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Miller, The Testimony of the Rocks, pp. 107 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Memoirs, I, 386.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

design. The creation of this present design began, he said, in the middle of the second verse of the first chapter of Genesis--"and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Reference to the time when the earth was "without form and void" provided for an indefinite antiquity of the globe, allowing room for all the "Ante-Mosaic theories" and without disturbing the literal reliability of Scripture. In resorting to the historical record Chalmers was not aware of being non-experimental. In fact, for him all that is historical, when "good and genuine," resolves itself into the experimental. The observation of others is substituted for our own, and historical evidence has thus the character, and in proportion as it is substantiated, should have the effect, of the observational. "History, if not direct, is at least derivative observation . . . and we do feel the utmost value for all those historical notices which serve to indicate that the world had a beginning."<sup>1</sup>

Having established this postulate, his next step was to demonstrate that in the present order of things there is abundant evidence of design. In regard to matter or external nature he introduced the distinction between laws of matter and dispositions of matter. Though he did not credit Newton with this distinction, he claimed his support from the following statements Newton had written: "the growth of new

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 99.

systems out of old ones, without the mediation of a divine power, seems to me absolutely absurd," and also "the system of nature was set in order in the beginning, with respect to size, figure, proportion, and properties, by the counsels of God's own intelligence."<sup>1</sup> This distinction has satisfied quite a few, being particularly acceptable to John Stuart Mill,<sup>2</sup> but the advance of the philosophy of physics has swept more and more of the indicated dispositions within the "machine," according to recent claims.<sup>3</sup>

The compelling force of the argument from laws of matter is not at all comparable to the force of the argument from dispositions of matter. The weakness of arguing from the laws of nature to a Designer he indicated by pointing to the atheistical tendency it had given to La Place and to Mirabaud.<sup>4</sup> Dispositions of matter, on the other hand, have reference to the most beneficial arrangement of parts, properly shaped and sized, and endowed with forces and motions most suitable in given circumstances.<sup>5</sup> With laws and without dis-

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<sup>1</sup> Bridgewater Treatise, p. 17. The source of the second quotation from Newton we have been unable to find; the first one is from a letter from Newton to Bentley, included in The Correspondence of Richard Bentley, C. W., editor, I, 70.

<sup>2</sup> John Stuart Mill, A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive, II, 42.

<sup>3</sup> James Ward, Naturalism and Agnosticism, I, 47--8.

<sup>4</sup> Bridgewater Treatise, pp. 10--11.

<sup>5</sup> He preferred the term "dispositions" rather than "collocations," which only had reference to placing the parts in order. SW, V, 110--1.

positions we should still have but a heaving, turbid, disorderly chaos. Laws may "uphold" the movements of matter, but its dispositions "guide" them. Design is not indicated by the mere properties of matter, but by a right placing of designed parts of matter.<sup>1</sup>

By way of illustration Chalmers pointed to the distinction between laws and dispositions in astronomy. Only two laws can be recognized: the law of gravitation and the law of perseverance. Instances of dispositions were far more numerous, such as every arrangement of the various planets in respect to situation, magnitude, and figure. An even more apt illustration he thought the construction of the eye. In these and all other illustrations, the evidence of design grew in strength with the number and complexity of independent adaptations.<sup>2</sup>

In applying this distinction to his general argument from design, he affirmed that if the present dispositions were destroyed, there is nothing in the present laws that has even a tendency to restore them. "The laws of nature may keep up the working of the machinery--but they did not and could not set up the machine."<sup>3</sup> Since he had previously shown the dispositions to have had a beginning, his conclusion was that

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 109--13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 125--6. Cf. Butler's second sermon on "Human Nature," Sermons, Robert Carmichael, editor, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Bridgewater Treatise, pp. 15--16.

"they seem only referable to the fiat and finger of God."<sup>1</sup>  
 The main evidence from the external world for an intelligent Designer lay not in the existence or laws of matter, but in its dispositions--the adaptations of designed parts to a purposeful end.

From experimental evidence Chalmers saw definite indications of similarities between design in the external world and design in some other consequence whose sequential relation to its designing antecedent we have observed:

When we look on a house with its numerous conveniences, we instantly pronounce it to have been the fruit of contrivance, and that it indicates a contriver; and it is not for a different, but for the very same reason, that when we look on the world with its countless adaptations to the comfort and sustenance of those who live in it, we pronounce it to have been the formation of an Architect of adequate skill for devising such a fabric, and adequate power for carrying His scheme into execution.<sup>2</sup>

It was in the inferential step from the architect of the house to the Architect of the world that Hume had made an attack on the a posteriori approach, and in defense of his own position Chalmers dealt with Hume's attack.

At the core of Chalmers' argument against Hume was the principle of man's expectation in the constancy of nature --that is, an invariable constancy in the succession of events. This predisposition to count on the uniformity of nature is "an original law of the mind," and is not the fruit of our

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 152.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 87.

observation of that uniformity. It is "an immediate and resistless principle of belief in the human constitution, . . . an underived and intuitive belief . . . as strong in infancy as it is in mature and established manhood."<sup>1</sup> Experience only verifies our anticipation of nature's constancy, and in doing so, expressed the existing harmony between the intellectual constitution of man and the general constitution of nature, which strengthens the foundations of our intellectual processes. But this harmony between the constancy in nature and man's belief in that constancy is no necessary connection. Having no confidence in the general doctrine of innate ideas, he referred to this expectancy in the constancy of nature not as an innate idea, but as an innate tendency.

The doctrine of innate ideas in the mind is wholly different from the doctrine of innate tendencies in the mind--which tendencies may lie undeveloped till the excitement of some occasion have manifested or brought them forth. . . . There seems to exist in the spirit of man, not an underived, but an aboriginal faith, in the uniformity of nature's sequences.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in constructing his defense of the a posteriori argument, he was obliged, without admitting it, to call in an a priori principle.

Hume's argument against the inferential step in the a posteriori argument affirmed the regularity of nature's sequences, and only assumed the necessity of experience to as-

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 75.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

certain what the terms of the sequences actually are. Having once observed the conjunction between any two terms of an invariable sequence, he held that from the observed existence of either term, the existence of the other term can be concluded without further observation. But this full experience comprehensive of both terms is wanting, he alleged, in the question of a Maker of the world. Since the world is a "singular effect," our observation having been limited to the consequent of the sequence, we are hopelessly debarred from ever soundly or legitimately coming to the conclusion of a God as the antecedent.<sup>1</sup>

Chalmers accused Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart of meeting this skeptical position of Hume's by conceding that the argument for God is not an experimental one at all and that the inference from design is neither the result of reasoning nor of experience. They grounded the inference on "an intuitive judgment of the mind." Chalmers rejected their position as weak and inconclusive, and accused them of having mystified the argument for a God.<sup>2</sup> His method was to dispose of Hume's objection by grounding inference on an experimental

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<sup>1</sup> David Hume, An Enquiry concerning the Human Understanding, and an Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, pp. 136 ff. In his Dialogues concerning Natural Religion, p. 189, Hume concluded that the whole of natural theology resolves into one proposition, "That the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence."

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 72.

basis only, but in his reliance on the mind's instinctive expectation in the constancy of nature, he resorted to the kind of principle for which he rebuked Reid and Stewart.<sup>1</sup>

Chalmers criticized Hume for not discriminating between what is essential and what is accessory in the two terms of a causal succession. The above inference, he argued, was grounded not upon a whole world, but upon a "something" in the world. Certainly we have not observed a whole world being made, but a "something" made or done in the world and from which "something" alone we infer it had a Maker. Borrowing Paley's illustration of a watch, he said that we do not infer a maker from a whole watch under observation; the inference is made from a "something" in a watch, and that "something" is the adaptation of means to a particular end. As of watch-making, so of world-making--it need not necessarily be an adaptation to a particular end, but only to an end. "We have only to make this further abstraction from the end to an end to get at the only essential consequent on which the inference is founded."<sup>2</sup> From such a discrimination he concluded:

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<sup>1</sup> Chalmers' interpretation of Stewart's position was not exactly accurate, for though Stewart was not very critical of the a priori argument, he made it clear that the existence of God is not an intuitive truth, but is reached by an a posteriori procedure. Dugald Stewart, The Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man, I, 338. Reid's answer to Hume may be examined in his Works, William Hamilton, editor, pp. 461 ff.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 92.

Adaptation to an end, that character with the reading and interpretation of which we have been familiar from infancy, is inscribed on it everywhere; and from the simple relations which obtain among the orbs that roll above, to the manifold and multiform relations of usefulness among the parts of animals and vegetables below, do we behold all nature instinct with the mind of a Divinity--all teeming and alive with the evidences of a God.<sup>1</sup>

Evidence from design pointed not only to the existence of God, but also to several natural attributes. Following the line of reasoning presented by Thomas Brown, Chalmers saw in the harmony of the universe a proof not only of design, but of a relative unity in the design. Therefore, he said, the designing power is one. Proceeding thence, he determined His omniscience--we can discover no limits to His knowledge--and His omnipotence--we can discern no limit to His power. Thus, "from the mere operation of the instruments which He hath formed, we may collect His natural attributes."<sup>2</sup>

#### EVIDENCE FOR GOD FROM THE CONSTITUTION OF THE MIND

As in the combinations discernible in the external world, so in the constitution of the human mind did Chalmers find evidence for a God. He recognized the different methods of gathering evidence from the two fields, the former being "calculated," the latter being "felt;" yet he struggled to free himself from any charge of being non-experimental or

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 98.

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 465.

mystical. The argument from mind, though less in semblance, was no less in substance, an inferential process, being summed up in the Psalmist's words:

He that planted the ear, shall he not hear?  
 He that formed the eye, shall he not see? . . .  
 He that teacheth men knowledge, shall he not know?<sup>1</sup>

Only one step is necessary from the consciousness of the mind to the conviction of the mind that originated, and Chalmers felt that the existence of a natural theology among all men resulted from this "instant and universal step."

The a priori principle necessary in this process he admitted more openly than he did in his discussion of our expectation of a constancy in nature:

That the parent cause of intelligent beings shall be itself intelligent is an aphorism, . . . is a thing of instant conviction, as if seen in the light of its own evidence, more than a thing of lengthened and laborious proof. . . . If it cannot be exhibited as the conclusion of a syllogism, it is because of its own inherent right to be admitted there as the major proposition. To prescribe every such truth, or to disown it from being a truth, merely because incapable of deduction, would be to cast away the first principles of all reasoning. It would banish the authority of intuition, and so reduce all philosophy and knowledge to a state of universal skepticism. . . .<sup>2</sup>

In making this admission, he was aware of the "occult mysticism" wherewith the argument from mind could be charged; therefore, he did not weary of reiterating his choice theme that even this evidence for God is largely a matter of in-

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 94: 9--10.

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 161.

ference.

The mind, being the seat of our moral, intellectual, volitional, and emotional natures, offers a variety of evidences for God. By far the most important is what Chalmers called "the supremacy of conscience." The conscience is not to be identified with the moral law universally written on the hearts of mankind, but to the moral sense which perceives the moral law--the law being the light, the conscience the eye; the law the guide, the conscience the presiding judge.<sup>1</sup> Nor is the conscience just another faculty of the mind as Thomas Brown suggested:<sup>2</sup> it is the supreme faculty of the mind, whose place is for "mastery or regulation over the whole man," whose object "is to arbitrate and direct all these propensities," whose "peculiar office is that of superintendence."<sup>3</sup> This emphasis he received from Bishop Butler, whose view of conscience may be illustrated from this quotation:

. . . this faculty was placed within to be our proper governor to direct and regulate all under principles, passions, and motives of action. This is its right and office, thus sacred is its authority. And how often soever men violate and rebelliously refuse to submit to it, . . . this makes no alteration as to the natural right and office of conscience.<sup>4</sup>

Whether it be an original or a derived faculty was no con-

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph John Gurney, Chalmeriana, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 184. Cf. Thomas Brown, Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> SW, V, 189.

<sup>4</sup> Bütler, op. cit., p. 56.

cern for the theologian; the fact of the uniformity among all men of "the Divinity within us" is the thing of importance. In failing to deal seriously with the metaphysical nature of conscience, Chalmers was almost inviting the criticism that came from his contemporaries, who would have had him at least discuss Locke's view of conscience--"our own opinion of our own actions."<sup>1</sup>

By supremacy of conscience, Chalmers meant the authority of a master faculty presiding over all other faculties in such a way that its authority is felt by all to be rightful, whether deferred to in practice or not.

It may not be the habit of all men to obey conscience; but it is the sentiment of all men that conscience ought to be obeyed. This is necessarily involved in the very idea of conscience--its precise function being to take cognizance of the right and the wrong--of the ought and the ought not. The supremacy of conscience may be regarded therefore as an identical proposition. To say that it is right to obey conscience, is but to say that it is right to do what is right.<sup>2</sup>

A man cannot be too subservient to his conscience, just as a watch cannot be over-regulated. Conscience is the rightful sovereign in man. Though despoiled of its authority, it still makes demands. Though denied of its rights, it continues to assert them. When the conscience is sovereign de jure, not de facto, the usurper has the might but not the right. "It

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<sup>1</sup> John Locke, An Essay concerning Human Understanding, I, 71.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 55.

is not the reigning but the rightful authority of conscience that we under the name of her supremacy contend for. . . ."1 The authority of principle is distinguished from the power of principle.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, conscience is never satisfied until it achieves its purpose: to govern the whole man.

In his effort to emphasize the empirical nature of his argument, Chalmers inserted the distinction between the objective nature of virtue and the subjective nature of the human mind by which virtue is felt and recognized. So realistic was his view of ethics that he compared virtues with "eternal truths of geometry." As to their source he wrote, "Virtue is not a creation of the Divine will, but has had everlasting residence in the nature of the Godhead."<sup>3</sup> In regard to man this virtue is not binding, but man's conscience tells him that it is. Thus, "by the supremacy of conscience we affirm a truth which respects not the nature of Virtue but the nature of Man."<sup>4</sup>

Chalmers thought that he was stating only what all men felt--that the supremacy of conscience is an appeal to the experience of all men:

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 186.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Butler, op. cit., pp. 55--6. This distinction of Butler's, which Chalmers borrowed, was also used by Frederick Temple, who made an advance upon Butler's psychology by explaining the duality that had been left unresolved. The Relations of Science and Religion, pp. 35 ff.

<sup>3</sup> SW, V, 180.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

The theology of conscience has often been greatly obscured; but never, in any country, or at any period in the history of the world, has it been wholly obliterated. . . . It is a universal feeling--to be found wherever men are found because interwoven with the constitution of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

In connection with this claim he had to refute the adverse criticism that threatened the theistic argument from conscience. With the exceeding diversity of moral judgments and the lack of consistency in the codes of virtue among the nations, how can the supremacy of conscience be the basis of any evidence for God? Though his threefold answer is far from conclusive, it does suggest reasons for these different conceptions of morality. (1) The apparent diversity is partly reducible into the blinding or distorting effect of passion and interest, being sometimes so powerful as to obscure our perception. (2) Sometimes it may be resolved into perversity of conduct rather than perversity of sentiment. Two men may agree on the authority of certain laws but disagree on their application. (3) In most cases, though, it is because understandings view it differently. In proportion as the understandings of men become more enlightened, so do their consciences become more accordant with each other.

The consciences of all would come forth with the same moral decision, were all equally enlightened in the circumstances, or in the essential relations and consequences of the deed in question; and, what is just as essential to this uniformity of judgment, were all view-

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 197--8. Cf. VII, 54.

ing it fairly as well as fully.<sup>1</sup>

In both teaching and preaching Chalmers could not over-rate the importance of the supremacy of conscience. Bishop Butler he credited with having brought to light its importance in his day, and in commending Butler's sermons on "Human Nature," he claimed them to be "one of the most valuable documents extant in the whole authorship on moral science."<sup>2</sup> From the Bishop's sermons relating to conscience, he had gleaned most of his views on the subject, and to him he acknowledged his debt. In a preface to the Bridgewater Treatise he wrote, "I have derived greater aid from the views and reasonings of Bishop Butler, than I have been able to find besides in the whole range of our existent authorship."<sup>3</sup> He also acknowledged his indebtedness for a ruling sense of the subject's importance to later writers, such as Sir James Mackintosh and Adam Smith, from whose writings he quoted with strong approval.<sup>4</sup>

From a presiding judge within, Chalmers saw a necessary association in the mind with the idea of a Judge without. Conscience suggests the idea, and even "the sound and warrantable conviction," of a God, based on "an argumentum

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 202--3.

<sup>2</sup> SW, XII, 132.

<sup>3</sup> Bridgewater Treatise, p. xxxiii.

<sup>4</sup> SW, V, 182. Cf. James Mackintosh, Ethical Philosophy, pp. xxii--xxx, xlii--xliv; and Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, pp. 281--2.

a posteriori." By inference this instant conclusion of the mind comes to us in the course of one rapid transition from the feeling of a judge within to the faith in a Judge and a Maker who placed it there. The rapidity of the inference makes it appear to be intuitive, but Chalmers was insistent that it was not:

The sense of a governing principle within, begets in all men the sentiment of a living Governor without and above them, and it does so with all the speed of an instantaneous feeling; yet it is not an impression, it is an inference notwithstanding--and as much so as any inference from that which is seen, to that which is unseen.<sup>1</sup>

His contention here is not that all men consciously arrive at a knowledge of God by this inferential step, but that the knowledge of God possessed by all men has come to them by means of at least one step of inference. The only other means he could see by which the universal knowledge of God could be explained was to attribute it to innate ideas or intuition: this would have been impossible for him.

The evidence from conscience was not so much for the existence of God as for His moral character: the conscience is "our original and chief instructor in the righteousness of God."<sup>2</sup>

He would never have established a conscience in man, and invested it with the authority of a monitor, and given to it those legislative and judicial functions it obviously possesses, and then so framed it, that all its decisions should be on the side of that virtue

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 196.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 372.

which He Himself disowned, and condemnatory of that vice which He Himself exemplified.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the authority of conscience in the constitution of the mind were two corollaries suggested by Butler: "the power and operation of habit" and "the inherent pleasure of the virtuous and misery of the vicious affections."<sup>2</sup> In the former Chalmers sought to show that the law of habit works more effectively on the side of virtue than of vice, and therefore points to a righteous God. When enlisted on the side of righteousness, the operation of habit not only strengthens and makes sure our resistance to vice, but facilitates the most arduous performances of virtue. This tendency toward a virtuous character is a counteraction to the power of habitual vice, but Chalmers indicated no evidence for the stronger force of habit on the side of virtue other than his very general statement. Evidently he felt the weakness of this corollary, for in his Institutes he omitted any mention of this subject which had occupied a chapter in his Natural Theology and his Bridge-water Treatise.

In his treatment of the second corollary he resorted to a distinction in the rewards for doing right. Beside the moral sense of rightness, which comes from conscience, there is a physical sense of pleasure which results from doing right.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> Butler, op. cit., pp. 64--6.

Virtue is not only seen to be right; it is felt to be "delicious." Just as he recognized a pleasant sensation in eating, he recognized an "immediate sweetness" in virtuous action, or in other words, the dulce of virtue, as distinguished from its utile. Rewards for doing wrong have their counterparts: a sense of wrong-doing or remorse and bitterness in the evil action. Thus, "the pleasure attendant on good affections or deeds, or the pain attendant on bad ones, form an evidence for a God who loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity."<sup>1</sup>

Having dealt with evidences rising out of man's moral nature in particular, Chalmers then examined other aspects of man's nature to discover several further evidences for God in "the constitution of the mind." He conceived of the intellectual as the percipient part of our nature, including such functions as memory and judgment. The emotional referred to those states of mental feeling, such as fear, shame, and gratitude. The volitional was the determining aspect of the mind. The relations of these parts of man's nature, together with the moral, were arranged to show harmonious relationships which bespeak the hand of an intelligent and benevolent Designer. These adaptations he worked out in the last part of his Bridgewater Treatise, and parts were transferred to his Natural Theology. But in the summary of his natural theology

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 98. Cf. XII, 178.

in his Institutes he omitted any particular discussion of them, perhaps indicating the scant value he later attached to them.

Emotions, he thought, are connected with intellectual effort chiefly as consequences. An example of this adaptation is the desire for knowledge or the principle of curiosity implanted in the mind for the purpose of stirring man in the acquisition of knowledge. This mental appetency seeks for knowledge, the food of the mind, as its terminating object, without regard to its ulterior benefits.<sup>1</sup> Further adaptation is evident in the pleasures derived from intellectual achievement in itself, as well as from the beauty of the objects of truth contemplated in the intellectual pursuit. In the adaptation of the intellectual and the emotional, Chalmers saw an alliance between the intellectual and the moral. Perception and feeling are so interdependent that without the one, the other cannot be awakened. Present an object to the view of the mind, and the emotion suited to that object must consequently arise. Since thoughts give rise to feelings, virtuous and vicious emotions are due to virtuous and vicious thoughts. "And so it is by thinking in a certain way that wrong sensibilities are avoided, and right sensibilities are upholden."<sup>2</sup>

Holding that nothing is moral or immoral which is not voluntary, Chalmers worked out the mediate relation between

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<sup>1</sup> Bridgewater Treatise, p. 349. Cf. SW, XII, 176--8.  
<sup>2</sup> Bridgewater Treatise, p. 361. Cf. SW, XII, 184.

the emotions and the moral character, involving the moral, volitional, intellectual and emotional natures of man. The process was ordered in this way: the will, exerting itself when a thing is desired, arouses the faculty of attention, whose response is a certain thought followed in turn by a certain emotion. Virtuousness may thus be imparted to emotion by this relation, and it is thus that we can will the right emotions into being, not immediately but mediately-- as the love of God by willing to think of God. On the other hand, actions are voluntary in themselves, in that the mind can will them directly into being. This mental structure in man not only enables him to control his emotions by his own choice, but makes man morally responsible for both his emotional and his intellectual states.<sup>1</sup>

#### EVIDENCE FOR GOD FROM ADAPTATION OF MAN TO HIS ENVIRONMENT

In his Bridgewater Treatise, entitled The Adaptation of External Nature to the Moral and Intellectual Constitution of Man, Chalmers penetrated more deeply than the title suggests into an inquiry as to adaptations within the mind of its various constituents inter se. Giving a very broad interpretation to the phrase "external nature," he then outlined in great detail a series of adaptations existing between man and his physical and social environment. An abridgment of

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<sup>1</sup> Bridgewater Treatise, pp. 397--8.

this material, which had later appeared in his Natural Theology almost in toto, was included in his Institutes, indicating those sections that he deemed most important.

The first general adaptations he noted existed between man's moral constitution and his environment. External nature is so related to conscience that often some phase of it awakens the conscience, causing shame of detection or fear of its consequences or renewal of moral sensibilities. This restorative efficacy is correlated to a counteractive efficacy that acts as a preventative medicine in society.

A pure moral light is by this means kept up in society, composed of men whose thoughts are ever employed in 'accusing or else excusing one another'--so that every individual conscience receives an impulse and a direction from sympathy with the consciences around it.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, man is so related to his environment that in the social interchange of inherent pleasure derived from virtuous actions, there is generally a prodigious amount of happiness. For example,

While every giver who feels as he ought, experiences a delight in the exercise of generosity which rewards him a hundred-fold for all its sacrifices; every receiver who feels as he ought, rejoices infinitely more in the sense of the benefactor's kindness, than in the physical gratification or fruit of the benefactor's liberality.<sup>2</sup>

And in external nature's adaptation to the law and operation of habit he saw the possibility and even the probability of a "universal reign of virtue in the world."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 248.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 250--1. Such an adaptation did much to influence Chalmers' opinion on Pauperism.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

The many other adaptations he described can be divided into those of man to the material world and of man to man. Under the former such bodily affections as hunger find their counterpart in the material world, illustrating its adaptability to man's physical condition. In the "law of association" we have an example just as prevalent, though less observed. According to this law, when two objects are seen in conjunction or in immediate succession, the sight or thought of one is apt to suggest the thought of the other. Since this principle of suggestion does not explain our confidence in certain sequences in the future, he drew upon one of his "first truths," our expectancy of uniformity in nature, and showed that the verification of this belief in actual history indicates an invariable adaptation of external nature to the intellectual constitution of man. Our power of speech, as well as other forms of communication, bespeaks the contrivance of a Supreme Artificer.<sup>1</sup> Describing music as the "most beauteous adaptation of external and material nature to the moral constitution of man," he made this application:

It is the law of association which thus connects the two worlds of sense and of sentiment. Sublimity in the one is the counterpart to moral delicacy in the other. . . . It is a noble testimony to the righteousness of God, that the moral and external loveliness are thus harmonized--as well as to the wisdom which has so adapted the moral and the material systems to each other, that supreme virtue and supreme beauty are at one.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 331.

Further adaptation, suggested by Sir John Herschell, was the harmonization of the abstract intellectual process and the realities of the material world.<sup>1</sup> The mastery of man over the elements in the indefinite progress of physical science also shows the adaptation of mind and matter. From his geological studies Chalmers had observed a tendency toward a balanced fertility of the soil, operating in the general interest of society, from which he inferred a designed adaptation.<sup>2</sup> Two other adaptations were the relation between intellectual research and practical living, between the diversity of sciences and a corresponding diversity of tastes and talents among men.<sup>3</sup>

The series of adaptations of man to man was even more multifarious. Corresponding with our bodily affections are certain mental affections, furnished for our own particular good and for the good of society.<sup>4</sup> Anger he listed as such an affection, for it serves as a protection from violence and as a preventative of violence, acting in private life as do the terrors of the penal code over the community at large. Shame is another such affection, whose value may be observed in the balancing effect on the indulgence of passion between the sexes. Special affections, such as family ties

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 344--7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 350. Cf. IX, 37.

<sup>3</sup> SW, V, 350--9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 261--73.

and respect for superiors, enhance the civic and political well-being of society. Referring to most of these affections as instinctive, he wrote:

Man also has his instincts, which serve as the substitutes of moral goodness in him; but which therefore mark all the more strongly, by their beneficial operation, the goodness of his Maker.<sup>1</sup>

Even "the economic good of society" was adverted to for evidence of adaptation. Contributing to the well-being of society is an instinctive "sense of property" that, when related to man's "sense of equity," gives rise to his respect for the property of others. Chalmers saw in this diagnosis of the economic interests of man the provision not of man, but of God.

The sense of property, anterior to justice, exists in the hearts of all; and the principle of justice, subsequent to property, does not extirpate these special affections, but only arbitrates between them. In proportion to the felt strength of the proprietary affection in the hearts of each, will be the strength of that deference which each, in so far as justice has the mastery over him, renders to the rights and the property of his neighbour. . . . Under the guidance of nature and justice together, the whole earth might have been parcelled out, without conflict and without interference.<sup>2</sup>

With the maintenance of justice between man and man, he declared that the greatest economic well-being of a community is secured only where there is "perfect liberty" for men to seek to satisfy their "appetite for wealth," and only under such conditions of laissez faire may there be the interplay

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<sup>1</sup> Bridgewater Treatise, p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 297--8.

of beneficence and gratitude in the relations of rich and poor.<sup>1</sup> From society he observed two further adaptations. In the reciprocity between mind and mind, where weakness in a certain faculty in one person is balanced by strength in the same faculty in another, he pointed to evidence of nature's so distributing gifts as to promote "a mutual helpfulness" and "a mutual humility among men."<sup>2</sup> The last social adaptation is the balance existing between "conservative" and "movement" parties in both philosophy and politics, to the effect of their mutual action and reaction on the progress of thought in the world.<sup>3</sup>

#### PROBLEM OF EVIL

The conclusion of Chalmers' observations on the adaptations of man to his environment led to the chapter entitled "Capacities of the World for Making a Virtuous Species Happy; and the Argument Deducible from this, both for the Character of God and the Immortality of Man." Here he attempted to demonstrate that the total design of the world points to the moral character of God. The gist of his argument was this:

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 105--7; V, 304--23. This economic and social outlook strongly influenced his views on Pauperism, which occupied so much of his time and energy, though its significance was not as great as the moral implications which he recognized in the proposed Poor Laws.

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 361.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 362--5.

The original design of the Creator may be read in the natural, the universal tendency of things; and surely, it speaks strongly both for His benevolence and His righteousness that nothing is so fitted to insure the general happiness of society as the general virtue of them who compose it. And if, instead of this we behold a world, ill at ease, with its many heart-burnings and many disquietudes--the fair conclusion is, that the beneficial tendencies which have been established therein, and which are therefore due to the benevolence of God, have all been thwarted by the moral depravity of man. The compound lesson to be gathered from such a contemplation is, that God is the friend of human happiness, but the enemy of human vice. . . .<sup>1</sup>

In his effort to demonstrate that from human life we may observe signs of the righteousness of God, Chalmers became involved with the problem of evil. He had scrutinized almost every department of knowledge for examples of adaptation, indicating evidences of teleology in both mind and matter, and in the relation between the two. Now the persistent question of dysteleology confronted him, and he needed an answer for the man who might sing this parody of the Doxology:

Praise God from whom all cyclones blow;  
Praise Him when rivers overflow;  
Praise Him when lightning strikes the steeple,  
Brings down the Church and kills the people.<sup>2</sup>

Chalmers admitted his inability to offer a full and absolute reply to this question, but felt he had an answer more than sufficient for neutralizing the arguments of opponents who pointed to the miseries of mankind as refutation of the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 376--7.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by F. J. Sheed in Communism and Man, p. 157. He had read it in a Communist bookshop in New York City.

teleological argument.

Negatively, Chalmers discounted the proposal of Paley and others who would strike a sort of arithmetical balance between the good and ill of our world and then point to the surplus of the former as a ground for vindicating the divine benevolence. Data is so uncertain, thought Chalmers, and one cannot be sure of the computation.

Positively, he pleaded for taking a full view of God's moral nature, rather than toning down His righteousness, as the "poetical religionists" do, by summing up all His attributes into one--that is, His benevolence. If a man adequately responds to his conscience, he cannot but look to God as Lawgiver and Judge.

The sense of heaven's sacredness is not a superstitious fear. It is the instant suggestion of our moral nature.<sup>1</sup>

We should find a stable basis in existing appearances, did we give them a fair and full interpretation--as indicating not only the benevolence of God, but, both by the course of nature, and the laws of man's moral economy, indicating His love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity. . . . We learn from the phenomena of conscience that, however God may will the happiness of His creatures, His paramount and peremptory demand is for their virtue.<sup>2</sup>

In opposition to a utilitarian ethics he had written elsewhere, "We agree, too, with Bishop Butler, in not venturing to assume that God's sole end in creation was the production of the greatest happiness."<sup>3</sup> With this strong emphasis in the

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 367.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 371.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 313.

demand of God for righteousness, Chalmers felt he was on firmer ground for helping to "solve" the enigma of evil in the world.

The first origin of evil, he admitted, lies beyond the limits of our terra cognita, for both natural and revealed theology. But in the theory offered by Leibniz, Chalmers saw an hypothesis which, even though unproved, if only not disproved, could be of service in theology. According to Leibniz' theory of the origin of evil, the actual universe is conceived to be such as it is, because of all possible systems this one works for the greatest amount of good. God is not the author of evil, and evil is not the terminating object of His creation. That object is the production of the maximum of good. Evil has its place in the existing economy only because it is subservient to the perfectly benevolent and holy end which God had in view, and of which end alone He can be properly called the author. Leibniz, continued Chalmers, supposes all the possible forms of a universe to have been present to the divine mind from eternity. Only one of them has been embodied into an actual production by an exercise of God's creative and voluntary power. He willed this universe into existence, but He did not will the other forms into possibility. They were the objects of His understanding, just as number and figure were, of none of which He is the author. God is the author

only of that universe which He selected out of all the possible forms, that yielding the greatest amount of good envelops in it a certain amount of evil. It was not for the evil but for the good that the universe was called out of the region of the possibilities into a state of reality. In the words of Leibniz,

Evil comes . . . from ideas which God has not produced by an act of His will. . . . God . . . is not the author of the essences so long as they are but possibilities--but there is nothing actual which He has not decreed and gives existence to; and He has permitted evil because it is enveloped in the best plan which is found in the region of possibles, and that Divine wisdom could not fail to have chosen.<sup>1</sup>

Though criticizing this theory as "too optimistic," Chalmers said that it might be true, "for aught we know," though it could not be positively affirmed. Here, as elsewhere, he unfolded a favorite principle that hypotheses may be advanced in theology to answer objections even when they do not establish positive truth.

In spite of the origin of evil lying beyond the limits of our terra cognita, it is possible, Chalmers thought, to trace evil toward its source. Both physical and moral suffering are so correlated that "the sufferings of humanity are mainly resolvable into the sins of humanity."<sup>2</sup> Except for death, accident, and unavoidable disease, he regarded the miseries of mankind as traceable to the character of man and

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 416. Quoted from Essay, Article 338. Leibniz' views on creation were discussed in The Monadology and other Philosophical Writings, Robert Latta, editor, pp. 240, 337--51.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 102.

not to the condition he occupies. He made no attempt to offer a solution for these "exceptions," nor to delve into the deeper question of the metaphysical nature of evil. But there was no doubt in his mind that the final victory of good over evil would be realized, at least in heaven if not on earth, vindicating the sovereignty of God, as well as the righteousness of God--a cornerstone of Chalmers' theology.

#### EVIDENCE FOR IMMORTALITY

The evidence for immortality of the soul occupied a minor place in Chalmers' scheme of natural theology, receiving very slight and almost casual treatment in comparison with the attention given the evidence for God. He intimated a pre-supposition as to the likelihood of man's abiding existence as a conscious being on the other side of death, but failed to elaborate or establish this position, and proceeded to search for evidence by his favorite a posteriori method, paralleling his theistic approach.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning he abruptly brushed aside any consideration of what he termed a psychological or physical argument. He saw no force in reasoning that spirit must be imperishable because of its essential difference from matter, as was advocated by his contemporary, Lord Brougham.<sup>2</sup> Nor did

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 112 f.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Lord Brougham, A Discourse of Natural Theology, pp. 127, 137.

he value the argument from the moral state of the mind, and more especially from its "progressive expansion."<sup>1</sup> Butler's stand on the "indivisibility of consciousness" he discounted as demonstrating "but the posse, and not the esse of the soul's immortality."<sup>2</sup>

Chalmers recognized the validity of only two arguments for immortality, both resting upon moral and theological considerations. The first argument was grounded on "the general law of adaptation," which would be violated if the boundless desires and capacities of men were not provided with the objects of a future and eternal state. Just as we have light for the eyes and atmosphere for the lungs, so by "the general law of adaptation" we must have an objective counterpart for the affections and wants of the subjective living creature. Both mind and heart possess such unlimited capacities as can be filled only by experiences beyond death, and man would be a violent anomaly to the harmony of things if no future existence were provided for the realization of his great longing for nobler and higher things.<sup>3</sup> Having presented this argument with some force, he later felt its insecurity as only an "inkling of the truth" and warned against relying too strongly on its evidence.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SW, IV, 522--5.

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 510.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VII, 113--4; V, 380--93.

<sup>4</sup> SW, V, 483.

From the authority of conscience he derived the second argument, the strongest within the compass of the light of nature. It is grounded on man's conviction that a judge within implies a Judge without, whose unconditional demand for righteousness prompts the apprehension that a day of retribution awaits us. We cannot imagine a God of righteousness, thought Chalmers, who would leave any question of justice unsettled--first between man and God, and second, between man and man.<sup>1</sup>

### III. THE VALUE OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

#### EVALUATION OF EVIDENCES

The natural theology of William Paley and of Bishop Butler converged in Thomas Chalmers. To Paley's emphasis upon design and Butler's emphasis on conscience Chalmers was indebted for the bulk of his natural theology. His zealous admiration for both masters accounts, in part, for what at times appear to be contradictory statements as he weighed up these two main bodies of evidence. Though he never completely integrated their emphases in his own system, it is quite evident that Butler increasingly overshadowed Paley in influencing Chalmers.

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 115--7; V, 249, 377--80. Chalmers likened this argument to Kant's argument for immortality in NBR, pp. 271--331.

In assessing the various evidences for the existence and character of God, Chalmers gave more and more weight to the evidence from the mental constitution, especially conscience. Even though the mental proofs may seem harder to evolve than the material, and offer fewer examples of design, they are more effective for the popular understanding. The argument from mind more promptly suggests and far more powerfully convinces men of a God. Its utility is enhanced by the universality of its recognition, for "the most illiterate of the species recognize a presiding Deity in the felt workings of their own spirit, and more especially the felt supremacy of conscience within them."<sup>1</sup> In comparison with any external evidence he wrote:

This internal evidence outweighs in impression, and perhaps also in real and substantive validity, all the external evidence that lies in those characters of design which are so variously and voluminously inscribed on the face of the material world. It has found an access for itself to all bosoms. We have not to look abroad for it, but it is felt by each man within the little homestead of his own heart; and this theology of conscience has done more to uphold a sense of God in the world than all the theology of academic demonstration.<sup>2</sup>

Again and again he ascribed the highest value to this evidence. "The supremacy of conscience the greatest and most influential argument for the being of a God;"<sup>3</sup> "the most powerful and practical impression which nature gives us of

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 168.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 97.

<sup>3</sup> Loc. cit.

a Deity;"<sup>1</sup> "conscience . . . our original and chief instructor in the righteousness of God."<sup>2</sup>

In his Bridgewater Treatise and his Natural Theology, Chalmers regarded conscience as only an aspect of the mental constitution, but its overshadowing prominence in the argument for God was consistent with the tendency in other writings, particularly his later ones, to telescope the evidence from the teleology of the mind into the evidence from conscience alone. So strong was his emphasis upon conscience that more than once he nearly escaped into ethical theism, as Caldecott suggests.<sup>3</sup> In certain respects he would have regarded himself as an ethical theist, but, on the other hand, his strong insistence on his method's being experimental and his argument a posteriori would have tended to put him in the category of demonstrative theist. In his last years his slight acquaintance with the philosophy of Kant led him to the conclusion that Kant's argument for God from the categorical imperative and his own from the supremacy of conscience were the same:

It is true that we do not call it the Categorical Imperative, or place it under the head of the Practical Reason. . . . It is substantially the same argument notwithstanding, and couched by us in surprisingly coincident language with that of Kant and his commentators. . . .<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 168.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 372.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Caldecott, The Philosophy of Religion in England and America, p. 135.

<sup>4</sup> NBR, p. 311.

But in spite of Kant's contention to the contrary, Chalmers insisted that the argument should properly be thought of as a posteriori, and therein he failed to detect a basic difference between Kant's moral argument and the generally accepted argument from the authority of conscience.

Concerning the force of the argument from conscience, Chalmers concluded that "the theology of nature is the theology of conscience; and conscience tells every possessor of it, if not the certainty, at least of the probability of a God."<sup>1</sup> Usually in his natural theology he dared not venture beyond the probability for which Butler had contended, but occasionally he pointed more toward the realm of certainty. His general approach was more to indicate the evidences for God in such a way that it would appear foolish not to accept them, rather than to construct a dogmatic argument for His existence. In fact, he sometimes seemed to show himself more anxious to persuade men that they already believed in God, rather than to prove to them that God existed. In a practical application of his argument he said that "in our first addresses to any human being on the subject of religion, we may safely presume a God without entering on the proof of a God."<sup>2</sup> One wonders if the Pascal who had helped to lead to Chalmers' conversion did

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 320.

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 208.

not have a lasting influence on his theological outlook; for in his earnest search for God, Pascal had found comfort only when he heard God say, "Thou wouldst not be seeking me, hadst thou not already found me. Be not therefore disquieted."<sup>1</sup>

Concerning the moral attributes of God, Chalmers thought that in mental phenomena we have the more distinct and decisive evidences; and in conscience alone we have strong evidence for the moral character of God, including his justice, truth, goodness, righteousness, and holiness. "It [argument from conscience] is the strongest, we apprehend, which nature furnishes for the moral perfections of the Deity. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, he related the signs of God's character to the signs of His being in stating that "whatever serves to indicate the character serves also to confirm the existence of the Divine Being."<sup>3</sup>

Indebted so much to conscience for the existence of a natural theology among men, why did Chalmers exert so much time and energy on other arguments? He explicitly stated two reasons. Because of the "occult mysticism" with which an argument from the mental constitution might be charged, he preferred as "rich and various" an argument as possible, expatiating over wide fields of induction to "amass stores

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<sup>1</sup> Blaise Pascal, Pensées and Opuscules, p. 578.

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 208.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

of evidence."<sup>1</sup> Second, he dealt with the argument from the design of external nature because of "its special adaptation to the habitude of those minds which are disciplined in the methods and investigations of Physical Science."<sup>2</sup> Two additional reasons may be added. His earlier admiration for Professor Robison's instructions in natural philosophy led him to find a ray of light in the darkness of his skepticism in the remarkable harmony between the human mind and the processes of nature--a theme of his Bridgewater Treatise. In addition, there was the unusual and multifarious interest in the study of physical and social sciences that had captivated Chalmers from his earliest intellectual efforts.

From both design in matter and adaptation between man and his environment Chalmers observed evidences for the existence of God, as well as for several of His attributes. Most abundant were the instances of design and adaptation, and from them all he felt that he could rightly infer an intelligent Designer. That this Designer is God was for Chalmers a common-sense conclusion, and he failed to note the difficulties involved either in the inferential step or in the assumption about the inferred Designer. The strength of this argument lay in complementing the less desirable aspects of the argument from conscience and in

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> NBR, p. 316.

presenting evidence for God to men with a strong empirical attitude.

Two further questions should be considered in this section: what was Chalmers' attitude to the use of hypothesis and of analogy in natural theology? It was a favorite principle of his, as we have seen, that hypotheses may be advanced in theology to answer objections even when they do not establish positive truth; in other words, the hypothesis sets aside the unlimited major premise necessary to establish the infidel objection. In dealing with the problem of evil he used the theory of Leibniz' as an hypothesis to obviate certain objections to the teleological argument.<sup>1</sup> Another instance where he made use of hypothesis was in answering the objection to prayer drawn from the uniformity and fixed character of the laws of nature, by showing that we can trace the agencies of nature only a little way back, and that "interferences" may take place in that outer region that lies beyond the cognizance of man.<sup>2</sup>

He expressed a similar regard for the use of analogy. In his lectures on Butler's Analogy, he claimed that the office of analogy was "entirely a defensive one."<sup>3</sup> Its purpose was to vindicate, rather than to establish, a position. To

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 414--31.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 432--59. Cf. sermon on "On the Consistency between the Efficacy of Prayer and the Uniformity of Nature," SW, III, 617--34.

<sup>3</sup> SW, V, 564.

repel the objections of the adversary was the service of analogy. This conception of analogy was very limited, for did he not use analogical reasoning in his teleological constructions? Some would go so far as to restrict the proof from evidences of design to an argument from analogy, but Fisher pointed out that the argument from design may also be an instance of inductive reasoning.<sup>1</sup> But in Chalmers' teleological argument, analogy was definitely involved, and in his sermon on "The Constancy of God in His Works an Argument for the Faithfulness of God in His Word," he gave practical application to this principle of reasoning.<sup>2</sup>

#### USEFULNESS AND INSUFFICIENCY OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

Having noted Chalmers' evaluation of, and general attitude toward, the different arguments for God, we may ask the question, What practical value did he see in natural theology? In brief, it was this: a prompter to inquiry. Natural theology has a rightful place in the academic world and should be earnestly pursued by theologian and philosopher, Chalmers thought; but for all practical purposes, it was definitely a science in transitu.

The principal usefulness of natural theology is the direction it points and the impelling force with which it

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<sup>1</sup> George Park Fisher, The Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief, pp. 31--2.

<sup>2</sup> SW, III, 597 ff.

sends the inquirer onward in his search.

It is a call upon man's attention--not perhaps to inform but to awaken him. He obeys this call who places himself on the outlook for any traces or manifestations of God. The missionary who lands upon his shore will find him the first to listen to his message--at least the first to be impressed by its aspect of honesty and sacredness. . . . It is the existence of this impression which secures an introduction for us.<sup>1</sup>

It gives to man a certain sense of God and of His law, and along with this as its unavoidable accompaniment, in all various degrees of strength and sensibility, a certain sense of guilt. Inseparable from his feeling of a law must be the feeling of his distance and deficiency therefrom. The prevalent religious feeling of our species--the "unlettered multitude" as well as "our best philosophers"--is formed not so much by confidence in a benevolent God as by the dread of an offended God.<sup>2</sup>

Natural theology may present the problem, but it can offer no adequate solution--hence, its insufficiency.

How can the breach between God and a guilty world be repaired, or how can a readjustment be effected between a righteous Lawgiver and the transgressors of His law? . . . It is a question which nature can originate, but which nature cannot solve. . . . Revelation is called for, not merely as a supplement to the light and informations of nature; but far more urgently called for as a solvent for nature's perplexities and fears. Natural theology possesses the materials out of which the enigma is framed; but possesses not the light by which to unriddle it.<sup>3</sup>

It fails not only to solve the problem of our guilt, but

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<sup>1</sup> SW, V, 476.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 121--3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 122--4.

also to answer the question as to the great and general design of the whole creation, or what may be termed "the policy of the Creator." Amid all the particular instances of design with which nature presents us, there is the utmost ignorance on our part of the general design of creation. Nor do the discoveries of science serve to alleviate the mystery; if anything, they enhance the mystery and make the purposes of the Supreme Being more inscrutable than before. "Every possible addition to the evidence of natural theology but enhances the difficulty of the question, 'Wherewith shall a man appear before God?' and so enhances our need of a revelation."<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, we have already observed the difficulty natural theology comes up against when it attempts to account for the ills of life. Chalmers admitted this weakness, even in his attempt to reduce most of the ills into moral causes, and recognized natural theology's inability to give a sufficient answer to Job's persistent "Why?" The most appalling mystery is death, he said, and "a strange undefinable hope" in immortality, given us by natural theology, serves not to alleviate the whole mystery concealed in the shrouded future of every man.<sup>2</sup>

In disclosing its own insufficiency, natural theology

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 125. See V, 404 for an illustration in the field of astronomy.

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 478--9.

renders the great service of impelling men toward a higher theology and leaves men, as William Temple put it, with the "Hunger of Natural Religion." The late Archbishop of Canterbury's summary echoed this conclusion of Chalmers':

[Natural Theology] may assure him that there is a God who both claims and deserves his worship; it may bid him to seek that God and the way to worship Him; but it cannot confront him with the God it describes. . . . Therefore Natural Theology, which is indispensable as a source of interpretation and as a purge of superstition even for those who have received a true revelation; yet if left to itself ends in a hunger which it cannot satisfy, . . . a hunger for that Divine Revelation which it began by excluding from its purview.<sup>1</sup>

Chalmers realized that we are apt to undervalue, if not set it aside altogether, when we compare the obscure and imperfect notices of natural theology with the lustre and fullness of Christian revelation. Therefore its rightful place in the Christian scheme should be clearly understood and defined. He insisted that it not be considered as the foundation upon which the edifice of Christianity is built. It is "the taper by which we grope our way to the edifice."<sup>2</sup> Butler he strongly criticized for speaking of Christianity as a supplement to natural religion--"the more which natural religion discovers, the less may Christianity have to supple-

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<sup>1</sup> William Temple, Nature, Man, and God, pp. 519--20. In spite of Temple's conclusion, it is interesting to note that the founder of the Gifford Lectures differed from Chalmers in holding that the whole subject of natural theology and moral obligation should be investigated without reference to any alleged revelation. William Garden Blaikie, Thomas Chalmers, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> SW, V, 484.

ment."<sup>1</sup> With Chalmers, it was the other way--the more which natural religion discovers, the more will Christianity have to supplement. Morell he also criticized for referring to natural theology as the basis of Christianity in the same way that one might refer to the relation of the foundation of a house to its superstructure.<sup>2</sup> Chalmers preferred to call it "the basis of Christianization."<sup>3</sup>

The most important exemplification of the way in which natural theology bears upon Christianity he suggested to be furnished by the question of a sinner's acceptance with God. In a sermon on "God Is Love," Chalmers showed how natural theology serves as a basis of Christianization. It prompts the inquirer in two ways: by inspiring him with the mystery of God and by condemning him through his conscience for his disobedience to the Judge of the world. The first need is met in the Incarnation; the second in the Atonement. "By the former a conquest has been made over the imaginations of ignorance. By the latter a conquest has been made over

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 123.

<sup>2</sup> NBR, p. 320. Morell's reply to this criticism indicated the absence of the practical emphasis which Chalmers was prone to attach to every study. Commending Chalmers for his discussion, he continued to hold that natural theology is the only true basis of revealed theology. Natural theology is not a reflective study--does not preach or appeal, but reasons. "It does not aim directly at a moral effect, but only at a logical conclusion." J. D. Morell, An Historical and Critical View of the Speculative Philosophy of Europe in the Nineteenth Century (Appendix to 1848 edition), p. 737.

<sup>3</sup> SW, V, 485.

. . . the solid and well-grounded fears of guilt."<sup>1</sup>

That natural theology is the precursor of Christianity should, therefore, not be misunderstood. There is no logical dependence of the latter on the former. It is not an argumentative priority, as in a process of reasoning, but only an historical priority in the mind of the inquirer.

The natural precedes the Christian theology, just as the cry of distress precedes the relief which is offered to it, or rather, as the sensation of distress precedes the grateful and willing acceptance of the remedy which is suited to it.<sup>2</sup>

Christian theology can in no way be deduced from natural, but evidence for their common origin is very pronounced in observing their perfect adaptation--between the wants and aspirations of the one and their fulfillment by the other.

Chalmers was confronted with two schools of thought in regard to natural theology--one emphasizing its insufficiency, the other its importance. The two positions were perfectly reconcilable to him; he therefore championed the cause of natural theology, recognizing its important bearing on the promotion of evangelical Christianity. The concluding words of his Natural Theology indicated the soteriological direction toward which his natural theology pointed:

It is a science not so much of dicta as of desiderata. . . . For the problem which natural theology cannot resolve, the precise difficulty which it is wholly unable to meet or to overcome, is the restoration of sinners to acceptance and favour with a God of justice. . . . It makes known to us our sin, but it cannot make known to us salvation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SW, IV, 444.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 125.

<sup>3</sup> SW, V, 497.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

If the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the authentic record of God's revelation to man, then, according to Chalmers, the problem for the Christian theologian is simply to answer the question, What readest thou? The truth of Christianity and the validity of the Scriptures are so interdependent that to demonstrate the latter is to prove the former. Thus, to show that the Bible is authentic is the preliminary step to any systematizing of Christian theology.

This apologetic strain in Chalmers' thinking came to light in his article on "Christianity," written for the Edinburgh Encyclopedia and published in separate form in 1814. He discussed almost exclusively the credentials of Christianity rather than its contents.<sup>1</sup> Development of his thought on Christian evidences can be traced through his later writings, especially in the Preface to The Christian Defence against Infidelity (1829) and in a revision of his former treatise on the evidences published in 1836 as The Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation, and included in Volume VI of his

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<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Editor David Brewster he said that the system of Christian doctrine fell better under the article on "Theology," being written by Dr. Andrew Thomson. Memoirs, I, 376.

Select Works. The Institutes of Theology represent his maturest thought on the subject, with a section on "Evidences of Christianity" falling between "Natural Theology" and "Subject-Matter of Christianity."

Though the apologetic approach occupied the largest part of his thought in these suggested writings, and will concern us chiefly in this chapter, let it not be imagined that such an approach represents the whole of Chalmers' view of Scripture. All argumentation fades into insignificance when we peruse those devotional masterpieces of his late years, Daily Scripture Readings (Horae Biblicae Quotidianae) and Sabbath Scripture Readings (Horae Biblicae Sabbaticae), published as the first five volumes of his Posthumous Works. The Bible becomes the living Word of God, to be heard and obeyed, rather than discussed and defended. This strain finds expression in his sermons, as well as in his Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans.

Both apologetic and devotional approaches to Scripture converged in a most unusual way in Chalmers, though in the case of the former, the purpose was not so much to construct a support for his own faith as to develop a weapon for wielding against the unbelieving enemy. Not for a moment, after his Kilmany experience, did Chalmers doubt the divine origin of Scripture, "that appointed depository of all religious in-

formation,"<sup>1</sup> containing "the testimony of an authentic messenger from Heaven. . . ." <sup>2</sup> The Bible formed a body of truth revealed by God to man, "the authentic record of an authentic communication from Heaven to Earth," being a "Book indited by holy men of God, who stood charged, not with the matters of physical science, but with those transcendently higher matters which relate to the moral guidance and the moral destiny of our species."<sup>3</sup> "This book . . . is the word of God-- . . . a message constructed by Him, and specially adapted by His wisdom to the special object of recalling a lost world from its state of exile and degeneracy. . . ." <sup>4</sup> The integrity of the whole of Scripture he never questioned:

If any part of Scripture, however small, have been given up in deference to a religious antipathy, if any words, however few, have been taken out of this book because they are offensive to the principles or feelings of a particular sect, then, in concession to the demands of that sect, the integrity of Heaven's Record is violated.<sup>5</sup>

### I. NECESSITY OF REVELATION

Before embarking on an extensive analysis of the evidences of Christianity, Chalmers offered a few remarks on the question of the necessity of a revelation. He was opposed

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<sup>1</sup> Chalmers' words quoted in Joseph John Gurney, Chalmeriana, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> SW, III, 41.

<sup>3</sup> SW, V, 150.

<sup>4</sup> CW, XII, 57.

<sup>5</sup> Memoirs, III, 330.

to the view that the historical necessity of a revelation had to be established before inquiring into its validity. There was no logical propriety in this. Little value could be seen in comparing the general state of mankind before and after the introduction of Christianity. Favoring the a posteriori over the a priori, he concluded that "instead of founding our convictions of the truth of the gospel on the real or the imagined necessities beforehand for such a dispensation, would we look both to the event in itself, and to the events which followed it, and thus build an argument for the reality of our faith on the basis of its existing memorials and its recorded testimonies."<sup>1</sup> In this position he went contrary to Butler,<sup>2</sup> but found support in Paley.<sup>3</sup> Following the latter he thought it philosophically unsound to suspend judgment on the truth of revelation till its necessity be established. It is not that God must and did reveal, but rather that He did, and it must have been necessary.<sup>4</sup>

Differing from an historical necessity is an experimental or personal necessity, whose importance should not be

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 128. In a footnote on the following page Chalmers simply noted that in Romans 1:21,22, an historical necessity for revelation is not overlooked.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Butler, The Analogy of Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature, Part II, Chapter I.

<sup>3</sup> William Paley, Paley's Works, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> SW, V, 541.

confused with that of the historical. It is based on experience rather than excogitation, Chalmers said, a finding rather than a fancy. Our wants and feelings as conscience-stricken sinners lead to the awareness of a sense of guilt and danger and cause us to cast about for deliverance. So it is our inner need for a revelation which impels us to a persuasion of its reality and gives us an impulse toward the Bible. The need could never of itself have led us to devise or to discover the truths of revelation, and "it is only when this felt disease and its proposed remedy are brought into juxtaposition that the light of a satisfying evidence is struck out from the adaption between them."<sup>1</sup>

## II. AUTHENTICITY OF CHRISTIAN REVELATION

From his conclusions in natural theology Chalmers turned to the evidences for the truth of Christianity, or what was to him the same thing, the authenticity and validity of Scripture. There was a progressive development in his thinking on the evidences, and in ascribing certain views to him we shall refer to those which formed the final stages of development, indicating the previous trends which his views had taken. His final conclusion divided the evidences into two main groups: the historical and the experimental.

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SW, VII, 129.

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Historical evidence rests the authenticity of Christian revelation chiefly upon the credibility of the messengers. Chalmers thought that since it is the office of history to inform us what has been observed by others, then this evidence, though based on derivative rather than on direct or primary observation, should be considered as Baconian in character as those which we personally observe.<sup>1</sup>

Upon written testimony is our faith in all ancient history founded, said Chalmers, but there is a peculiar impression given to the testimony when its subject is a fact connected with religion. Some are led to overrate the strength of this testimony and others to underrate it. Upon the whole Chalmers thought it unfavorable, and he proposed this:

To form a fair estimate of the strength and decisiveness of the Christian argument, we should, if possible, divest ourselves of all references to religion, and view the truth of the gospel history, purely as a question of erudition.<sup>2</sup>

We should like them [Jewish and Christian writers of Scripture] to be tested in the same way as all other authors, and, ere they are admitted as the chroniclers of past ages, to pass through the ordeal of the same criticism that they do.<sup>3</sup>

"The greatest of our historical proofs in behalf of

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VI, 180-1.

<sup>2</sup> "Christianity," p. 357.

<sup>3</sup> SW, V, 102-3. Cf. VII, 219.

Christianity is the miraculous power said to have been put forth by its first teachers, as the evidence of their supernatural commission. . . ."1 With such a declaration Chalmers began to expound his approach to the traditional argument from miracles. Miracles, to him, caused no infringement on the order of cause and effect readily observable in the universe, for the special intromission of the divine will to perform the miracle was but the introduction of a new cause, making the causal antecedent different from what it was before.<sup>2</sup> In general he accepted the eighteenth century argument from miracles, but it was in his defense of this argument against the attack made by Hume that Chalmers deviated from the usual treatment.

In his essay on "Miracles" Hume did not directly attack the belief in miracles, nor even their validity. What he did attack was the idea that their veracity could be substantiated by mere reason or that they could be used as an argument for the truth of Christianity. His contention in this essay was summed up in these words: "Our most holy religion is founded on Faith, not on reason."<sup>3</sup> Experience was Hume's guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact. Since a firm and unalterable experience has established

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1 SW, VII, 129.

2 Ibid., p. 138.

3 David Hume, "Miracles," Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects, p. 200.

the laws of nature, and since a miracle is a violation of these laws, "the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, he concluded, it is unsound to claim for the power of testimony the ability to establish the truth of miracles.<sup>2</sup>

"Defenders of the faith" rose up to meet Hume's skeptical approach to previously accepted arguments. Paley's response to Hume was that it was simply a question between sound sense and subtle metaphysics. Though he gave it very meager treatment, Chalmers saw some advantage in Paley's contention that the character and example of the original apostles who reported the miracles should be persuasive enough proof for the credibility of their testimony.<sup>3</sup>

One of the best known defenses of the miraculous argument was made by George Campbell of Aberdeen. He proposed to prove that the whole of Hume's argument was built upon a false hypothesis, namely, that "evidence of testimony is derived solely from experience."<sup>4</sup> This was not incontestable

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> As Norman Kemp Smith pointed out in his Introduction to Hume's Dialogues concerning Natural Religion, p. 64, behind Hume's argument against miracles was the premise that came to light in a following essay, "Of a Particular Providence and a Future State," namely, "that we have, and can have, no grounds, either in reason or in experience for postulating the kind of God to whom alone the Scriptural or other miracles can fittingly be ascribed."

<sup>3</sup> SW, VI, 25; VII, 136--7. Cf. Paley, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> George Campbell, A Dissertation on Miracles, p. 12.

truth to Campbell; on the contrary, he believed that "testimony hath a natural and original influence on belief, antecedent to experience."<sup>1</sup> He would regard faith in testimony as one of the "original grounds of belief," a first principle in company with such a truth as our belief in the constancy of nature.<sup>2</sup>

It was on this point of Campbell's attack on Hume that Chalmers was in disagreement. He sided with Hume in holding that faith in testimony is not a principle sui generis in the mental constitution, but is resolvable into our faith in the constancy of nature. Campbell had based his principle on the observation that confidence in testimony is strongest in childhood, thus indicating that experience leads to diffidence rather than confidence in the power of testimony.<sup>3</sup> In reply Chalmers suggested that experience neither augments nor diminishes our faith in the constancy of nature's processes. But it does augment or diminish our expectation of a given result in particular cases. A child learns to discriminate, so while experience nullifies one set of expectations, it fortifies and builds up another set.<sup>4</sup> But even if Campbell were right in his view respecting the origin of our faith in testimony, Chalmers did not consider it a worthy debating point and

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<sup>1</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> SW, VI, 48--9.

in any case, Campbell's introduction of this principle helped to cloud rather than to clear up the issue.<sup>1</sup> On these grounds he refused to accept Campbell's refutation of Hume and attempted to substitute another.

Chalmers' refutation was based on the principle that the evidence of testimony is resolvable into that of experience, granting to Hume the validity of his hypothesis.<sup>2</sup> From this hypothesis Hume's argument took these steps: we have never experienced a violation of the laws of nature; we have experienced falsehood of testimony; therefore, it is not in the power of testimony to establish the truth of this violation, that is, a miracle. The only exception to this, and one which Chalmers failed to mention, is where the falsehood would seem to be more miraculous than the reported miracle.<sup>3</sup> In his failure to note this exception, Chalmers weakened his whole argument. It was Hume's failure to distinguish between different kinds or species of testimony that made Chalmers accuse him of faulty reasoning.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 42--3. Cf. VII, 130 ff.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VI, 45.

<sup>3</sup> Hume, "Miracles," op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>4</sup> Chalmers' criticism ran thus: "The fallacy of this syllogism is akin to that which is termed by logicians the fallacy of composition--the middle term being used in the one premise distributively, and in the other collectively. In the above syllogism the middle term, or testimony, is used collectively in one of the premises and distributively in another." SW, VI, 63.

The subtle error of Mr. Hume's sophistry lies in this, that he makes all testimony responsible for all the instances of falsehood--whereas he should make each species responsible for its own instances.<sup>1</sup>

The way in which we would meet the general charge of Mr. Hume against testimony, is, by the separation of testimony into its kinds, and making each kind responsible for itself.<sup>2</sup>

Convinced that he had neutralized Hume's hostile argument, he advanced a proposition to establish the validity of the miraculous argument. ". . . after having by one testimony of the highest order neutralized all the improbability which Mr. Hume ascribes to a miracle, we can by the remaining testimonies of like quality and power build up an evidence for miracles far surpassing all that we possess for the events of common history."<sup>3</sup>

Chalmers recognized in his refutation of Hume the advantage of using an argument "as firmly posted as the disciples of modern science, on the evidence, the purely observational evidence of ascertained facts,"<sup>4</sup> "and so makes it peculiarly fit for being presented to mathematicians and the cultivators of the exact sciences."<sup>5</sup> In spite of devoting several chapters to the argument, there is little in it that cannot be found in a combination of Campbell, Penrose, Le

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VII, 135.

<sup>4</sup> SW, VI, 87.

<sup>5</sup> SW, VII, 135.

Bas, and Paley. It was to his discredit, though, that in misreading Hume he errantly portrayed the object of his attack and consequently misdirected some of his shots. And, as Leslie Stephens has pointed out, to agree with Hume on his presuppositions is to place oneself in an impossible position for invalidating Hume's argument.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding, his chief biographer credited him with making "an original and most valuable contribution to the Evidences of Christianity,"<sup>2</sup> and William Cunningham ascribed Chalmers' refutation as "the best and most conclusive that has been given, most accordant with the dictates of sound philosophy and common sense."<sup>3</sup>

As an auxiliary evidence to the miraculous, Chalmers inserted the argument from prophecy. His concern was not to reflect on particular prophecies, but to bring them to bear on the general argument for the truth of Christianity. He recognized two components of prophecy: the forthtelling, which is "the word of doctrine, . . . the great instrument of conversion,"<sup>4</sup> and the foretelling, which, when followed by the fulfillment, amounts to a miracle of knowledge. These "miracles of knowledge" he regarded as more important to the Christian Fathers, while the "miracles of power" con-

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie Stephens, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, I, 339 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs, I, 379.

<sup>3</sup> William Cunningham, Theological Lectures, p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> SW, VII, 194.

cern us more.<sup>1</sup> While recognizing the importance given to the evidence of prophecy by Jesus and His apostles,<sup>2</sup> he disdained to stress this aspect of the historical argument, perhaps because of the frequent obscurity of prophetic language,<sup>3</sup> and because of the extreme position given to the study of prophecy by some of his contemporaries.<sup>4</sup> In a letter to his sister he expressed this attitude:

I look on prophetic studies as very confirming, though I hold as of first importance a Bible reading, and practical books that may influence the heart on the side of practical Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

Turning now to the numerous evidences that Chalmers suggested as falling within the general historical argument, we divide them into five groups, the first relating to the harmony of Scripture. He noted the unity of purpose and counsel by which from first to last the whole of the Bible is pervaded.<sup>6</sup> Closely related is that perfect unity of mind and of purpose which is ascribed to Jesus.<sup>7</sup> More important is the consistency of each writer with himself and with the other writers of Scripture. Chalmers considered the alleged contradictions admitted of an actual solution, or at least

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1 Ibid., p. 214.

2 Ibid., pp. 216--8.

3 "Christianity," p. 380.

4 Specific reference was made to Edward Irving, Memoirs, III, 163.

5 Letter to Mrs. Morton, 2 January 1845, Correspondence, p. 246.

6 SW, VI, 258.

7 "Christianity," p. 368.

of a hypothetical solution.<sup>1</sup> The writings of Horne, Blunt, and Graves illustrated how alleged contradictions could be dissolved, and Paley's Horae Paulinae demonstrated for him such a harmony between so many portions of Scripture that he concluded that one of two hypotheses must be accepted: "Either it must have been a true history, or else a most artful and laborious fabrication."<sup>2</sup> Especially was this true in examining the circumstantial evidence of the four gospels. "There is nothing," he wrote, "that can at all compare with this in any other of the narratives of ancient history."<sup>3</sup> Such a harmony between the different writers of Scripture he claimed to be "the greatest supporter and strengthener of historic faith."<sup>4</sup>

A second group of historical evidences could be summed up under the general style and tone of Scripture. Among these are what he called the "likelihoods of truth"--"a credible aspect," "a certain tone and bearing of honesty," and the "natural signs of truth."<sup>5</sup> He alluded to the "literary credentials of revelation," which illustrated "the self-evidencing power of the Bible" in impressing themselves on the minds of simple readers who may be unable to compute

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VI, 250.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VII, 165. Cf. "Christianity," p. 367.

<sup>4</sup> SW, VII, 164.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 142--3.

the force of the natural signs of truth.<sup>1</sup> The simple and unostentatious manner of Scripture writers, especially the New Testament evangelists, and the artless manner in which circumstances were introduced, lend strength to their validity.<sup>2</sup>

The life and character of those who wrote the books of the Bible help to confirm the truth of what they wrote. The persecution of early Christians served as a criterion of the proof of their sincerity: they believed the story to be true. At the same time, reasoned Chalmers, the persecutions proved the truth of their testimony, for had it been false, the persecutors would have refuted the alleged facts on which their testimony was based.<sup>3</sup> Another aspect of this evidence is the general confidence expressed by one writer of Scripture in another, as seen when one refers to the narrative of another, or quotes his statement in such a way as to indicate the high esteem in which each is held.<sup>4</sup>

The fourth group of historical evidences he designated as monumental evidence. Included are the accuracy of geographical references in Scripture, the presence of commemorative architecture, especially sculpture, and the evidence of ancient coins.<sup>5</sup> The presence of the Jews as a separate race today is a testimony to the validity of the

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1 Ibid., pp. 158--9.

2 "Christianity," p. 367.

3 Ibid., pp. 368--9.

4 SW, VII, 148--50.

5 Ibid., pp. 151--6.

Old Testament, and Chalmers did not fail to suggest the evidential value of certain Jewish and Christian institutions of<sup>72</sup> day such as the Passover and the Lord's Supper.<sup>1</sup>

Forming the last group of historical evidences was the corroboration of non-scriptural writers with what is recorded in Scripture. The testimony of the Christian Fathers offers "the main strength of the exscriptural historical evidence for the truth of Christianity."<sup>2</sup> They put their stamp of approval on the validity of the New Testament by frequently quoting it. Their testimony was superior to the non-Christian because they had nearer and more direct access to the original sources of information, Chalmers believed, though he recognized that some regard the Christian's testimony as being too biased to be authoritative. To such a position, he would give this response: "Men might die for a falsehood, but would they die for what they believed to be a falsehood?"<sup>3</sup>

The Jewish and secular historians also gave many instances of corroboration, as illustrated in their allusions to manners and customs of the day,<sup>4</sup> and Chalmers was indebted especially to Lardner's Credibility for material in this section of his study.<sup>5</sup> Grotius' work on The Truth of the

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1 SW, V, 106 ff.

2 SW, VII, 176.

3 Ibid., p. 180.

4 "Christianity," p. 364.

5 SW, VI, 262 ff.

Christian Religion also served to substantiate the harmony between Biblical and non-Biblical authors.<sup>1</sup> In the writings of Josephus, Chalmers saw many examples of historical events paralleling those in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> Celsus admitted the truth of miracles by ascribing them to magic,<sup>3</sup> and the Roman historian Tacitus deponed ~~se~~ expressly to the persecutions of the Christians in the reign of Nero.<sup>4</sup> Further concurrence was given to the Biblical story by the silence of early opponents who would have liked to demonstrate its falsehood. And another implied testimony to its truth he saw in the testimony of every early convert.<sup>5</sup>

Chalmers constructed his case for the historical argument for the truth of Christianity from this abundance of specific evidences and their interrelation with the validity of miraculous acts and prophetic fulfillments in Scripture. His keen interest in historical apologetics was most unusual for an evangelical Scots theologian,<sup>6</sup> but its Baconian character was too pronounced not to attract this

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1 SW, V, 103.

2 SW, VI, 261 ff. Cf. "Christianity," p. 376.

3 SW, VII, 188.

4 Ibid., p. 181.

5 "Christianity," pp. 363, 370. Cf. SW, V, 105.

6 See James Walker, Scottish Theology and Theologians, pp. 40 ff., where he spoke of "the comparatively unimportant place our evangelical theologians used to attach to the historical argument."

lover of inductive philosophy.<sup>1</sup> For both philosopher and peasant he recognized a definite value in this approach. This "literary and argumentative evidence" gains for Christianity the respect of the lettered, and at the same time vindicates the validity of its message and leaves them without excuse for failing to come to Scripture itself.<sup>2</sup> The presentation of the well-attested miracles should at least secure the respectful attention of both lettered and unlettered; with that, the subject-matter of Christianity is brought into immediate contact with the mind of the inquirer, and then it is that the converting evidence comes into play.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "If there be one idea rather than another in which I feel myself more disposed to luxuriate, it is in the strictly Baconian character of the historical evidence for the truth of Christianity. . . . Give me the truly inductive spirit to which modern science stands indebted both for the solidity of her foundation and for the wondrous elevation of her superstructure. . . ." SW, VII, 220. Cf. "Christianity," pp. 384--5.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VI, 360--2.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VII, 228--9. In this connection Chalmers discussed the relation "between the truth of a miracle, and the truth of the doctrine in support of which it is performed." In Scotland the interest was in vindicating miracles as sufficiently ascertained facts, but in England the tendency was to accept the miracles as facts and to question whether they were real credentials from God and vouchers for the Christian revelation. Chalmers' attention centered on the former at first, but later was directed more toward the latter, basing his discussion then on an anterior natural religion. SW, VI, 229 ff.

EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE

In his early years Chalmers placed little or no value on the experimental or internal evidence of Christianity, but changes in his views finally led him to give a very high estimate of the experimental. In 1802 he considered the historical evidence the most satisfactory and attached little value to the internal apart from the external.<sup>1</sup> An 1803 lecture to his chemistry class confirmed the same position, and stressed its connection with the inductive philosophy derived from Newton and Bacon.<sup>2</sup> About six years later he affirmed that he had earlier been confirmed in the assurance of Christianity by Butler's Analogy.<sup>3</sup> For several years following 1809 the record of his study indicated an emphasis on the historical argument, including such works as Lardner's Credibility, Newton's Prophecies, Campbell's On the Gospels, Maltley's Illustrations of Christian Evidence, and Lardner's Canons of the Old Testament and the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> The year 1814 saw his article on "Christianity," which was written for the Edinburgh Encyclopedia, published in a separate volume as The Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation. Hostile criticisms of his devaluation of experimental evidence appeared in the Edinburgh

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1 Memoirs, I, 143.

2 Ibid., pp. 144--5.

3 Ibid., p. 146.

4 Ibid., pp. 204--5.

Christian Instructor, January 1817, and the Quarterly Review, July 1817, but the most effective critique was the dissection of Chalmers' work in the Principles of Christian Evidence Illustrated (1818) by Duncan Mearnes.

These hostile criticisms led Chalmers to reconsider his position, and though many influences may be suggested to account for the change, one cannot underestimate the influence of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, with whom he visited and corresponded. In the autumn of 1818 Erskine sent to Chalmers the first draft of his Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion, in which he attempted "to show that there is an intelligible and necessary connection between the doctrinal facts of revelation and the character of God [as deduced from natural religion] . . . and further, that the belief of these doctrinal facts has an intelligible and necessary tendency to produce Christian character. . . ."1 Though we have no indication of Chalmers' reaction to this volume, we can assume at least no strong disfavor; and perhaps we can assume some degree of satisfaction on his part, for without contrary reference to this manuscript, he declared Erskine's The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel, which relied on the internal evidence, to be "one of the most delightful books that ever had been written."2

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1 William Hanna, editor, Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, p. 25.

2 Ibid., p. 100.

Chalmers' next publication on Christian evidences came out in 1829 as the Preface to a volume entitled The Christian's Defence against Infidelity, where he wrote: "We firmly believe that there is no one position in theology which can be more strongly and more philosophically sustained than the self-evidencing power of the Bible."<sup>1</sup> And again, ". . . there must be something more than the bare evidence of Christianity, to work the faith which is unto salvation. . . . They must open their Bibles, and give earnest heed unto the word of this prophecy. To the spirit of earnestness they must add the spirit of prayer."<sup>2</sup> Gurney ascribed these words to Chalmers in 1850:

The historical evidences of Christianity are abundantly sufficient to satisfy the scrutinizing researches of the learned, and are within the reach of all well-educated persons. But the internal evidence of the Truth lies within the grasp of every sincere inquirer. Every man who reads his Bible, and compares what it says of mankind with the records of his own experience; every man who marks the adaptation of its mighty system of doctrine to his own spiritual need, as a sinner in the sight of God, is furnished with practical proof of the divine origin of our religion. I love this evidence. It is what I call the portable evidence of Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

It was quite evident that Chalmers' views had changed considerably since his 1814 article. A revision of his volume on Christian Revelation was undertaken in 1836; statements in the original treatise were altered, the chapter on

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Chalmers, "Introductory Essay," The Christian's Defence against Infidelity, p. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. xxx.

<sup>3</sup> Gurney, op. cit., p. 7. Cf. Memoirs, III, 264.

prophecy was enlarged for clarification, and a section was added on internal evidence. The Institutes brought simplification and clarification to his 1836 revision. To contrast his earlier and later views we quote from his 1814 publication and then from his Institutes:

We hold by the total insufficiency of natural religion, to pronounce upon the intrinsic merits of any revelation, and think that the authority of every revelation rests exclusively upon its external evidences, and upon such marks of honesty in the composition itself as would apply to any human performance.<sup>1</sup>

Of all the evidence that can be adduced for the truth of Christianity, it [experimental] is that for which I have the greatest value--both from its being the only evidence which tells on the consciences and understandings of the great mass of the people, and also, I think, that evidence which is the main instrument of conversion, or for working in the minds of your hearers that faith which is unto salvation.<sup>2</sup>

In examining Chalmers' maturest thought on the subject we observe that he used the terms "experimental," "internal," "moral," and "spiritual," sometimes interchangeably, and sometimes to indicate different shades of meaning. But in general, "experimental" expresses the thought he had in mind--that what the Bible says and what one has experienced are in such perfect accordance that its divine origin becomes an incontestable conclusion.

Speaking generally of the "self-evidencing power of the Bible" (a favorite phrase of his), Chalmers said:

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<sup>1</sup> "Christianity," p. 389.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 221.

One thing is palpable throughout--its reigning and ascendant godliness. God is obviously the all in all of the Bible; and whatever system may be gathered from its contents, He is the soul and centre of that system.<sup>1</sup>

The high tone of sacredness and pure morality which pervades all the writings of the **Old and New Testaments**, a most impressive token of their credibility. . . . It is felt by men of moral earnestness that the Bible speaks thus for itself. . . .<sup>2</sup>

It is thus that a peasant may, in the act of reading his Bible, feel, and most legitimately feel, on the strength of his intimations given there, that he is holding converse with God. A majesty, and a moral greatness, and a voice of commanding authority. . . . We do not need to wait for the description of this evidence ere it shall become operative.<sup>3</sup>

How did Chalmers explain the way in which the individual was influenced by the evidence in the Bible? First, by the accordance between what the Bible says we are and what we find ourselves to be. It is a mirror of our own heart, and the reflection often awakens a consciousness of the true picture. The Bible says we are sinners; our consciousness agrees. The Bible says we are guilty before the Supreme Judge; our consciousness agrees. "It is thus that with no other apparatus than a Bible and a conscience, a light may be struck out between them. A man might be awakened thereby into a thorough conviction of sin. . . ."4 Second, there is the accordance between our need and what the Bible offers to satisfy that need. In the gospel of Christ, and

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1 Ibid., p. 156.

2 Ibid., p. 158.

3 Ibid., p. 206.

4 Ibid., p. 213.

there alone, man finds that precise counterpart which at once meets his need of forgiveness and resolves the difficulty.

Conversion to the truth as it is in Jesus, does not lie in the understanding being reached by a train of deductions; but it lies in the conscience being reached by the naked assertion of the truth. To go and preach the Gospel is not to go and argue it, but it is to go and proclaim it. . . . It is by simply promulgating the doctrine, and confiding the acceptance of it to the way in which it meets and is at one with the knowledge that a man has of his own heart, and the sense by which he is touched of his own necessities.<sup>1</sup>

The third stage of this process is explained by the accordance between our own personal history and what the Bible tells of Christian experience. This evidence is perpetually growing, and we begin to see what was invisible before, having been "called out of darkness into His marvellous light."<sup>2</sup>

The Bible is thus the bearer of its own credentials, and is universal in its appeal. "Their belief in Scripture, and we think all saving belief whatever, is grounded on the instant manifestation of its truth unto the conscience."<sup>3</sup>

Chalmers concluded in his speech at the laying of the cornerstone at New College:

. . . the most effective evidence for the divinity of Scripture is that which beams direct upon the mind from the face of Scripture itself, insomuch that, with no other apparatus than a Bible and a Conscience, a light may be struck out between them, which can guide the way, whether of a peasant or a philosopher, to heaven.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VI, 329. Cf. VII, 214 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 329--40.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Hugh Watt, A. Mitchell Hunter, W. A. Curtis, New College Edinburgh: A Centenary History, p. 3.

And elsewhere he added: "The evidence lies in the Word. It is the entrance of the Word which gives light. . . ."1

This evidence he frequently referred to as "the portable evidence of Christianity," portable in the sense that men can bear it to every door and every heart. In his farewell address to Alexander Duff in 1839 he stressed the importance of this evidence as the one effective in all cases of conversion,2 and the truth of this principle vindicated for him his philosophy of missions--that Christianity does not have to wait for civilization, but the message of God to man may be delivered immediately to all men.3

One further question should be considered in this section: what did Chalmers have to say concerning the relation of the Holy Spirit to Scripture? Let him illustrate for himself:

We can imagine a reader of the Bible to be visited with the resistless yet legitimate conviction, amounting to a strongly felt and immediate sense that God has spoken to him there--insomuch that he feels himself to be in . . . direct correspondence with God uttering His own words to him. . . .4

The "uninitiated" cannot be convinced of this truth, said Chalmers, and it is very difficult to explain to one who has not had the same experience. To Halyburton he attributed

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1 SW, VI, 295.

2 PW, VI, 445.

3 SW, VI, 369. Cf. VIII, 287.

4 SW, VI, 281.

one of the best explanations of such a "spiritual revelation."<sup>1</sup> The Holy Spirit serves to remove the scales from our eyes, and then we recognize "in the sentences which the Bible gives forth, the divinity of Him who utters them, directly announcing itself to be the voice of God clothed in mystery."<sup>2</sup>

Two truths Chalmers stressed on this subject. One concerned the necessity of God's Spirit's shining on the Word in every instance of conversion. This was the testimony of Scripture itself, and Chalmers had substantiated it by personal experience.<sup>3</sup>

. . . no evidence, whether external or internal, or with whatever truth and ability it may be expounded, should lead us to forget our entire dependence on the Spirit of God. . . . In other words, if we want to insure success, prayer must be added to performance.<sup>4</sup>

Unless the Spirit of God open our eyes to behold the wondrous things that are contained in the book of God's law, it will remain a sealed book to us.<sup>5</sup>

The second truth was that the Spirit "in revealing truth to the mind, reveals only the things which are contained in Scripture. . . . He sheds a light on the pages of the Word. . . . The design of His internal revelation, is to make the things of the external visible."<sup>6</sup> The Holy Spirit he compared with a telescope, bringing to our vision objects that were

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1 Ibid., p. 287.

2 Ibid., p. 286.

3 SW, VII, 208.

4 SW, VI, 363.

5 Letter to his sister, Isabel, 23 March 1824, Memoirs, III, 137.

6 SW, VI, 284.

there all the time, though invisible to the naked eye.<sup>1</sup> "We are not to expect the revelation of any new truth: it is all contained within the four corners of the Bible."<sup>2</sup> His conclusion was thus that this revelation by the Holy Spirit was "but an increased power of discernment, and things not seen before may evolve into manifestation--and the manifestation, it may be, of such characters of majesty and moral worth, as might force the conviction that God is verily in the Bible of a truth."<sup>3</sup>

#### EVIDENCES AND THE PULPIT

Having dealt profusely with the evidences of Christianity, Chalmers would have been expected to make frequent reference to them in the pulpit. But such was not the case. He reserved his apologetic discussion for the classroom. The *Astronomical Discourses* were designed to meet several specific objections to Christianity, but they, as well as the other of his extant addresses, were of a declarative rather than apologetic nature.

It was his custom after several weeks of lecturing on

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<sup>1</sup> SW, IV, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Gurney, *op. cit.*, p. 96. In recommending Michaelis' Introduction to the New Testament, Chalmers criticized him for expecting "an afflatus, or a vision, or a direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit, making revelation of new things rather than unveiling from obscurity, or giving animation and effect to the very revelation of the Bible." SW, VII, 253--4.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VII, 209.

this subject to impress upon his students that the historical evidences were definitely not for the pulpit, "where it is your proper office to bring the Word of God to bear immediately on human consciences."<sup>1</sup> The historical evidences may lead men to read the Bible or listen to the Christian message, but when they come to church, there should be presented not the messengers, but the message of Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Nor was there a place in the pulpit for expatiating on the virtues of the experimental evidence, or on the "rationale" of its influence and effect over the convictions of men. "That is my business, not yours," he would say to the future preachers. "To you belongs the executive task not of theorizing on this internal evidence, but of putting it into actual operation. . . . Your office is not to describe, but to stimulate this operation. . . . What you have to deal with is the subject matter of Christianity."<sup>3</sup>

To bring his thought home in a more personal way, he recommended to his students for their own spiritual growth,

. . . a prayer<sup>ful</sup> reading of the Bible--the only sure and direct way by which each might verify the process in his own experience. It is on this consideration that I have not recommended a great amount or variety of reading on the external evidence for the truth of Scripture. . . . My wish, I confess, is that your chief study should be in the book, rather than about the book. . . . I want all of you to be acquainted, and some of you to be

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VIII, 273.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VII, 231.

singularly and superlatively accomplished in the whole scholarship of the Christian evidences--and that in order to strengthen the bulwarks of the Church, or for the purpose of your holding argument, whether for defence or conviction, with its adversaries and aliens of all classes. But I want none of you so to linger at the threshold as to remain without, strangers to the glories of the inner temple. . . . you get at your faith in the very way in which the homeliest peasant gets at his. . . . It is the Spirit shining upon the word which illuminates the soul of each of these inquirers--the fruit of their earnest perusals and their earnest prayers.<sup>1</sup>

### III. INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

To prepare for his treatment of the inspiration of Scripture, Chalmers offered a few remarks on the subject of canonicity. The Apocrypha Controversy had made the problem of canonicity a very live question; but Chalmers evaded the battles that raged so fiercely and bitterly for a considerable time, though he sided with his friend, Andrew Thomson, who led the fight against including the Apocrypha in Bibles distributed by the Bible Society.<sup>2</sup> Chalmers regarded the apocryphal books as non-canonical mainly because he thought the early Jewish church had refused their admission to the canon.<sup>3</sup> That he regarded all the books unfavorably we have our doubts. Indeed his almost complete silence in the Apocrypha Controversy would suggest that he was not too strongly opposed to these writings, and we have at least one favorable

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 232--3.

<sup>2</sup> A discussion of this Controversy may be found in Henry F. Henderson, The Religious Controversies of Scotland, pp. 95--110.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VIII, 268.

reference to them. In a discourse on the danger of the Reform Bill he made this reference:

There is a fine passage in Ecclesiasticus, on the danger of entrusting with the arcana of government, men whose hearts and hands are full of the common business of life. I wish we were more alive to the principles which are there unfolded.<sup>1</sup>

Concerning this reference Chalmers made this explanatory statement, as reported by Gurney:

I take great delight in the book of Ecclesiasticus. Were I to speak merely from my own judgment of the internal evidence, I should say that it contains almost equal marks of inspiration with the book of Proverbs. But the New Testament gives no countenance to such an opinion. There is no book of the Old Testament so often quoted by the evangelists and apostles as the book of Proverbs; but they take no notice of Ecclesiasticus.<sup>2</sup>

As is suggested here, the external evidence for canonicity of the Old Testament rested partly on the quotations from other parts of Scripture. In the case of the New Testament, Chalmers admitted a different foundation--the general consent of the primitive churches, and the numerous attestations that can be gathered from the most esteemed Christian Fathers of the first three centuries.<sup>3</sup>

For his thought on the internal evidence of canonicity, we must turn to his discussion of inspiration itself. He seemed to accept without question that each of the sixty-six books of the Bible is inspired. So we may well ask him,

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, III, 405. See Ecclesiasticus 38:25,26.

<sup>2</sup> Gurney, op. cit., p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VII, 223. Cf. VI, 372 ff.

How are we to know if the Bible, or a book of the Bible, is inspired?

There was first of all the historical evidence:

The inspiration of Scripture in the gross rests chiefly on the testimony of Christ and His apostles. The inspiration of particular books or portions now in Scripture rests chiefly on the evidence that they belong to the canon, or in other words, that they were also then in Scripture; for then they must have been included in the sanction given by the founders of the Christian religion to Scripture, and to all Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

He elaborated thus: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God; The book of Proverbs is part of Scripture: Therefore the book of Proverbs is given by inspiration of God."<sup>2</sup> To his own question, How do we know the Bible to be inspired? he gave this answer: (1) because its writers were inspired; and (2) because the books are products of inspiration. The latter we conclude, he said, because of their own claim and by being included in "Scripture" by Christ and His apostles.<sup>3</sup> Because of his circular reasoning in this approach to inspiration, his case remains very inconclusive and most unsatisfactory.

Turning to the experimental evidence, Chalmers' presentation was more satisfactory. He recognized the difficulty of discriminating between inspired Scripture and uninspired apocryphal writings. A most unusual gesture for him,

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VI, 485.

<sup>2</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 455.

he discussed the reformers' position on this problem, and found some light in these words from Calvin:

All must allow that there are in the Scriptures manifest evidences of God speaking in them. The majesty of God in them will presently appear to every impartial examiner, which will extort our assent: So that they act preposterously who endeavour by any argument to beget a solid credit to the Scripture--the word will never meet with credit in men's minds, till it be sealed by the internal testimony of the Spirit who wrote it.<sup>1</sup>

Chalmers disagreed with Calvin on one point, though, and held that the historical evidence may precede the experimental. "It is by this historical probation that we discover the authorship of the Bible and all its parts. . . . It is by experimental probation that we verify this authorship."<sup>2</sup> The common man at first has to depend on the authority of the Church for the integrity of his Bible, and then can make the trial. And on this last phrase he would distinguish the Protestant approach from the Roman Catholic.<sup>3</sup>

Just what did Chalmers mean when he spoke of the "inspiration of Scripture?" Some suggestion came in his three-fold classification of the books of the Bible according to the method of their revelation: (1) Mosaic--result of personal converse with God; (2) prophetic--communication by dreams, visions, or voice; (3) divinely-inspired men--

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted and discussed in SW, VI, 489 ff. (Italics are mine.)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 495.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 491--2.

wrote under the impulse of the silent and authoritative guidance in their own mind.<sup>1</sup> But we get the clearest insight in his answer to the question, Does inspiration extend to the language of the Bible as well as to its doctrine and sentiment? Yes, said Chalmers, inspiration refers not to the doctrine as mentally apprehended by the writer but as brought forth in writing--the γραφαί.

It [Scripture] existed purely in heaven. It descended purely from heaven to earth. It was posited purely by the great agent of revelation in the minds of the apostles. . . . These high ascriptions are given not to the act of inspiration, but to the product of inspiration; and we are taught, by the uniform testimony of Scripture, to believe of that product, that it is divine, and immaculate, and perfect.<sup>2</sup>

As to the mode of inspiration, he preferred not to be too dogmatic:

I contend for the optimism of the Bible, which is really tantamount to contending for its plenary inspiration. Only I will not affirm positively, in how far the inspired men wrote at all times under a supernatural influence, or in how far they were left, each to the idiomatic cast and peculiarity of his own genius. . . . though this may affect the question of the modus operandi, it does not in the least affect the question of the opus operatum as being altogether perfect, unerring, infallible.<sup>3</sup>

The important thing to remember, thought Chalmers, is that "the whole Bible is Θεόπνευστος."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 390--1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 469--70.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VII, 223--4. (First italics are mine.)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

#### IV. CRITICISM OF SCRIPTURE

The two main objects of Scripture criticism, wrote Chalmers, are the integrity of the text and the interpretation of it. The first question is, "What did the authors of Scripture really write?" The second, "What is the sense or meaning of it?" The first he called "corrective criticism;" the second, "interpretative criticism."<sup>1</sup>

##### "CORRECTIVE CRITICISM"

Chalmers was satisfied that we have in our possession almost the exact text of the original writers. On account of the few minor errors caused by "the carelessness or involuntary mistake of transcribers and translators,"<sup>2</sup> there was a need for development in this field of research. The only approach that he suggested was that this research should be conducted on the same principles and by the same methods with the criticism of all ancient authorship.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to this lower criticism, and sometimes in confusion with it, he had a few remarks to make on the German higher criticism that was not the vogue in early nineteenth-century Scotland and was somewhat of a mystery

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

to Chalmers. This "transcendental criticism," as he called it, cast a questioning cloud over him, and he suspected it of trying to do the impossible--to vitiate or transform the subject-matter of Christianity. Its value as an instrument of discovery was microscopic rather than telescopic--dealing in things that are minute, but not in things that are momentous.

There are certain nugae difficiles which it can master, certain scriptural enigmas which it can resolve, certain eclaircissements which we should like it to prosecute to the uttermost. But as to the capita fidei, as to all the moralities of the Christian faith, it can make no addition to these, it can make no changes on these. It is powerful as a protector of the great truths we have; but not as a discoverer of more.<sup>1</sup>

In 1834 Chalmers wrote to Dr. Welsh, who was spending some time in Germany, and excerpts from his letter give us a summary of his views of Scripture criticism, as well as an introduction to the next section on "Interpretative Criticism."

In regard to the connexion between an erudite Scripture criticism and a sound theology, I feel very sure that there does obtain a subtle delusion which one cannot well advert to without seeming to depreciate the former. . . . I would ask whether the theology of Jonathan Edwards is not marked by great talent and profoundness and correctness withal, and yet he does not seem to have been indebted for it to knowledge or skill in Exegesis. I verily believe that many a ploughman in Scotland is a juster, and I will add a deeper theologian, than many a biblist in Germany. . . . The truth is, that those textual difficulties, the treatment of which requires the most arduous and elaborate criticism for their solution, generally relate to such matters as do

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<sup>1</sup> SW, XII, 4,5.

not enter into the staple or substance of systematic theology at all; insomuch that I do not acquiesce in the maxim without great and important modifications being laid upon it, that 'Bonus textuarius est bonus theologus.' . . .

Yet most earnestly I am for a far higher Scripture criticism than is known or cultivated in Scotland. Without it the church is wanting in a most essential equipment for defence of truth against heresy.<sup>1</sup>

### "INTERPRETATIVE CRITICISM"

There are three objects of interpretative criticism, said Chalmers: the philological--ascertaining the meaning of single words or phrases, the contextual--ascertaining the scope and meaning of each passage, the doctrinal--ascertaining or verifying the articles of the Christian faith.<sup>2</sup> He recommended the principle of Chrysostom, "the father of all legitimate interpretation," that the only way to arrive at a genuine interpretation of Scripture is "first to ascertain the literal, grammatical, and historical sense, since on that alone can be founded the moral, doctrinal, spiritual, or mystical--though the latter is not unfrequently the more important sense, and sometimes the only true one."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, III, 438--9. This statement should be compared with his warning against putting too much emphasis on Scripture criticism: "It gives the impression of certain lofty and recondite mysteries in theology to which they [higher critics] alone have access, and no other. It tends to cast a certain hieroglyphical obscurity over the science. . . ." SW, VII, 272.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 262.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

Nowhere did Chalmers enumerate his principles of interpretation, but from what he said on the subject and from examples of his own interpretations, we can summarize the most obvious of his views. A general principle to which he adhered was that "what is most important in the volume, is also in general most pervading."<sup>1</sup> He warned against excessive spiritualizing and pleaded for "its natural and obvious interpretation." He wrote;

We now live under the full revelation of the gospel; and why run in the pursuit of shadows, when the truth stands before us in the plainest and most substantial characters?<sup>2</sup>

From examples of his own interpretation, such as are found in his Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans, we observe that his approach was not so much exegetical as it was expository. The moral and spiritual message was foremost in his mind, and a soteriological twist was given whenever possible. Though he sometimes obscured his own interpretation by his eagerness for a personal application, he generally considered himself a literalist, and whenever possible, gave the most obvious meaning to a passage. Referring to the Genesis account he wrote,

The whole narrative of Adam in the garden should be taken in the plain, obvious, and literal sense. The attempts to allegorize it are wholly gratuitous and groundless; and more, are disproved by the subsequent allusions made to it in Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>2</sup> PW, VI, 92.

<sup>3</sup> PW, I, 3--4.

The constantly recurring theme in his writings is that in Scripture God is speaking to us and it is for us to listen, and then to respond. Let his own words testify:

When God speaks to us, it is our part to be silent; and having satisfied ourselves with the credentials of a professed message from him, nothing remains but that, with the docility of little children, we should learn and receive the contents of it--casting down our lofty imaginations, and every high thing which exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought of our hearts in captivity to the obedience of Christ. Otherwise we are in danger of asserting with one and the same breath, not only the sufficiency of reason, but the insufficiency of revelation.<sup>1</sup>

#### V. AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

In commending Chalmers for learning the lesson of Richard Baxter, Hanna said of his father-in-law:

His primary and most earnest effort was to derive his Christianity immediately from the Divine Oracles--to lay his whole being broadly open--to take off from the sacred page the exact and the full impression of Divine truth, in the very forms and proportions in which it has there been set forth.<sup>2</sup>

In the first place, Scripture was the source of his systematic theology. Chalmers suggested a strong practical analogy between a system of theology and a system in general science. The former's authority is the Word of God, the latter's the works of God. The sayings of Scripture correspond to the facts of science. "The Scripture critic [linguist] is in Christianity what the experimentalist or

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1. SW, VII, 393.

2 Memoirs, I, 261.

the observer is in science, and the systematic theologian is in Christianity what the philosopher is in science."<sup>1</sup> The only exception to the analogy is that one sentence of Scripture may form a general principle, which is not true of one fact in general science.<sup>2</sup> As one can observe from the Institutes, he sought to put the general principle of this analogy into operation, to bring the many testimonies of Scripture within an ordered system of theology.

As Scripture provided the facts for his system, so it provided the food for his soul. The Bible came first, general devotional books second. Daily he spent much time in company with The Book, seeking to find God and God's message to him.<sup>3</sup> During his last years he wrote devotional comments on his daily readings, and though he never expected the pub-

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 292.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 296--7.

<sup>3</sup> "His regular and earnest study of the Bible was one of the first and most noticeable effects of Mr. Chalmers' conversion. His nearest neighbour and most frequent visitor was old John Bonthron, who, having once seen better days, was admitted to an easy and privileged familiarity, in the exercise of which one day before the memorable illness, he said to Mr. Chalmers--'I find you aye busy, sir, with one thing or another, but come when I may, I never find you at your studies for the Sabbath.' 'Oh, an hour or two on the Saturday evening is quite enough for that,' was the minister's answer. But now the change had come, and John, on entering the manse, often found Mr. Chalmers poring eagerly over the pages of the Bible. The difference was too striking to escape notice, and with the freedom given him, which he was ready enough to use, he said, 'I never come in now, sir, but I find you aye at your Bible.' 'All too little, John, all too little,' was the significant reply." Memoirs, I, 262.

lic to see them, they were published posthumously as Daily Scripture Readings and Sabbath Scripture Readings. They were so different from the Institutes, begun about the same time, that Hanna remarked:

Engaged with the one, he brought to the Divine oracles a mind singularly free of theological prejudice; he sat as a little child at the feet of Divine wisdom, and received into a meek and loving heart, according to its plain and natural meaning, each utterance she gave forth. Engaged with the other, he brought to the sacred oracles a mind full-fraught with the true spirit of Inductive Philosophy, and collecting the varied testimonies of the Divine record as they lay scattered over the sacred page, he combined them into one complete and harmonious system.<sup>1</sup>

For the Church the Bible was the supreme authority in all matters, the safety of the Church lying "in the full recognition of Scripture and in the purity of her own standards as founded upon Scripture."<sup>2</sup>

In his correspondence frequent references were made to Bible reading. Here are two samples:

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, IV, 428.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., III, 529. As indicated in the Preface of this dissertation, we have excluded from the scope of this study a discussion of Chalmers' ecclesiology, including his sacramental views. It is appropriate here, though, that there be noted his apparent divergence from the traditional emphasis in Scotland. For Chalmers the "Church of the Word" greatly overshadowed the "Church of the Sacraments." The sacraments were primarily a sign, secondarily a seal. Memoirs, II, 389. ff.; 529--30; SW, VIII, 492 ff. In the "Table Controversy" Chalmers showed his little concern for "form" in celebrating the Lord's Supper, and a present authority has said that Chalmers "appears to have been the first to discontinue the long table and to communicate the people in their pews, thereby copying English Nonconformist practice." William D. Maxwell, An Outline of Christian Worship, p. 126.

Read the Bible with as particular an application to yourself as if you were the only person in the world, and as if, therefore, that redemption which was set up for the world was set up for your special and individual behoof.<sup>1</sup>

The Bible, if read with diligence, and the Spirit given to pour light upon the Bible, if prayed for with sincerity and earnestness, these are the great agencies and means by which the poorest and humblest of men might be made wise unto salvation. And there are other helps beside the Scriptures not to be neglected, for by them we might be the better enabled to understand the Scriptures. . . . But, after all, let me state in a single sentence what the likeliest expedient is for passing out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel. It is the PRAYERFUL READING OF THE BIBLE.<sup>2</sup>

So superior was the Bible to all other literature that Chalmers liked to quote Cowper's poem comparing Voltaire with a humble cottager:

She, for her humble sphere by nature fit,  
Has little understanding, and no wit,--  
Received no praise; but, though her lot be such,  
Toilsome and indigent, she renders much;  
Just knows and knows no more, her Bible true--  
A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew;  
And in that charter reads with sparkling eyes  
Her title to a treasure in the skies.<sup>3</sup>

Ever fearful that something might come between him and his Bible, Chalmers relegated reason to an inferior position, at least in some ways. His remarks on the relation of reason to revelation were few and scattered, but serve to give us some idea of his thinking on the subject. Reason, he said, had the right to sit as supreme arbiter

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to his sister, Jane, 13 October 1818, Memoirs, II, 444.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Mr. William Fortune, 5 October 1845, Correspondence, pp. 262--3.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in John Anderson, Reminiscences of Thomas Chalmers, p. 209.

on the evidences of a professed revelation, and then to ascertain the meaning of this alleged revelation; but on the same principles of grammar and criticism which determine the sense of any other author. After passing on the credentials of the messenger, "reason resigns her office," Chalmers said, and "nothing remains for it but the unqualified submission of our faith to all the doctrine and all the information wherewith he is charged."<sup>1</sup> In one sense they have different spheres, for revelation often goes beyond the province of reason, either to confirm or deny, but it is well, when possible, that one should receive the witness of reason in addition to the witness of Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

What disturbed Chalmers very much was the way in which many allowed creeds and confessions to come between them and Scripture. As a minister of the Church of Scotland he was pledged to give allegiance to the Westminster Confession of Faith and to the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, but seldom did he speak any word of commendation on their behalf. Whether in his system of doctrine he deviated from these standards is a problem of the next chapter, but certainly in his form and system he gave them little heed. He made little use of them as instruments of teaching either the

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VIII, 369.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 383. A discussion of the relation between reason and revelation in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity was presented in SW, VIII, 189 ff.

young, or the future ministers, and seldom do we find any mention of them in his sermons.<sup>1</sup>

The fear of the weighty hand of traditionalism never escaped him; he considered that "there is a stiffening and a systematic orthodoxy, which conflicts practically and in effect with the Bible."<sup>2</sup> Hear him plead in his private devotions:

Let me not be a slave of human authority, but clear my way through all creeds and confessions to Thine own original revelation.<sup>3</sup>

Deliver me, O God, from the narrowing influence of human lessons, and more especially of human systems of theology. Teach me directly out of the fulness of Thine own word.<sup>4</sup>

The same testimony he bore in a letter to James Anderson:

. . . they [catechisms] want the spontaneity and development of the immediate oracles. My Christianity approaches nearer, I think, to Calvinism than to any of the isms in Church history: but broadly as it announces the necessity of sanctification, it does not bring it forward in that free and spontaneous manner which I find

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<sup>1</sup> Occasional references may be found in his lectures, SW, VIII, 301, 344, 415. In preaching at the Scottish Church in London in 1842 he burst forth in words of praise, which were unique among his references to the creeds: "We are thankful for its [Scottish Church] doctrinal standards. They are clear and simple, and at every sentence they appeal to the written Word of God. They are self-consistent. There is not a word in the Confession which contradicts the Catechism, and not a word in either which contradicts the Scripture. . . . The standards of the Church of Scotland contain the Reformation doctrines in their fulness. . . . The Christian world has given its suffrage in favour of the Westminster Assembly, for no summary of faith has been so widely taught as its Shorter Catechism. It is a favourite with almost all Evangelical denominations." Remembering Zion, pp. 9--10.

<sup>2</sup> PW, II, 126.

<sup>3</sup> PW, I, 69--70.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 300.

in the New Testament. . . . I feel the influence of these systems to be most unfortunate in the pulpit. . . . I admit the doctrine of good works, not because it comes to me in the shape of a corollary to the demonstrations of the schoolmen, but because it comes to me in warm and immediate efficacy from "If ye love me, keep my commandments."<sup>1</sup>

In speaking to one of his daughters his language was even stronger:

I look on Catechisms and Confessions as mere landmarks against heresy. If there had been no heresy, they wouldn't have been wanted. It's putting them out of their place to look on them as magazines of truth. There's some of your stour orthodox folk just over ready to stretch the Bible to square with their catechism: all very well, all very needful as a landmark, but [kindling up] what I say is, do not let that wretched, mutilated thing be thrown between me and the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

These words indicate a strong current that flowed through Chalmers' theology, frequently pushing down any signs of dead traditionalism or cold orthodoxy. The Bible was for him the Word of God--not only the source of Christian doctrine, but also the fountain of divine energy. DIRECT TO SCRIPTURE rang from pulpit and chair, to both lettered and unlettered, for only in this revelation could man find the light and life of the Christian faith. We almost feel the warm breath of his vital faith as we read such prayers from his closet:

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, I, 241--2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., IV, 456. (Comment by Hanna.)

O what simple, but significant and impressive energy in the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

O give me heart and energy for these services; and let not a freezing orthodoxy lay its narcotic or paralyzing influences on the work of faith and labour of love. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Let me derive all my Christianity, whether its cre-  
denda or its agenda, direct from the fountain-head of inspiration; nor suffer the portly volumes of the erudite masters in our science, nor even the confessions and formularies of any of our Churches, to stand between me and the Word of God.<sup>3</sup>

Teach me directly out of the fulness and freeness of Thine own word; and hasten the time when, unfettered by sectarian intolerance, and unawed by the authority of men, the Bible shall make its rightful impression upon all, because--the simple and obedient readers thereof--they call no man master but Christ only.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Journal for 7 November 1811, Memoirs, I, 226.

<sup>2</sup> PW, V, 169--70.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> PW, IV, 350.

## CHAPTER V

### A SYSTEM OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Chalmers' Institutes of Theology are the primary source for a study of his system of Christian theology. They formed the substance of his lectures as Professor of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh, and were revised several times before his death. In 1849 they were published as the seventh and eighth volumes of his Select Works. The six "Supplementary Lectures" he had planned to embody in the Institutes, but since the editor has done practically the same thing, there is no indication that the present two volumes would have been substantially different had Chalmers published them himself. Less than 150 of the great preacher's sermons remain extant, but these provide a wealth of material for a proper understanding of his thought. Certain selections from his other writings also afford valuable insight into his theology.

In the second chapter, "Approach to Theology," we observed the unusual order which Chalmers followed in his theological course, and its analogy to his interpretation of the normal Christian experience. The presentation of his dogmatics in this present chapter follows the same general approach, being divided into four main parts: Sin, Salvation, Predestination, God.

## I. SIN

In the preface to his Congregational Sermons, Chalmers referred to the doctrine of human depravity as "the keystone of the Christian religion."<sup>1</sup> He felt that the first step in comprehending Christianity as a whole is a correct understanding of sin. To use the organizing of his theological system, before man contemplates a remedy for his disease, he must first recognize the disease and grasp some significance of a diagnosis of his condition.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is only natural that in a presentation of Chalmers' system of Christian theology we begin with his treatment of the doctrine of sin.

### ORIGIN OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

In the discussion of Chalmers' natural theology, we noted that he admitted his inability to offer a full and absolute solution to the problem of the origin of evil. In the "optimism of Leibniz" he felt that there was an hypothesis that might be true, "for aught we know," though it could not be positively affirmed; and such an hypothesis could legitimately be used in theology to answer objections even when they do not establish positive truth.<sup>3</sup>

As the origin of evil in toto lay beyond the limits of

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Chalmers, Congregational Sermons, p. xi.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 317 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Supra, p. 117.

our terra cognita, so did the origin of evil in a restricted sense, that is, in reference to sin itself. He made no attempt to speculate on this subject, nor did he have any use for the attempts of others. He simply began his chapter on the Origin of Human Depravity with this sentence:

We confine ourselves to the scriptural account of the introduction of sin into the world--for we possess no other which can be at all relied on.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond Scripture's historical account Chalmers preferred not to venture. The origin of the sinfulness of man, rather than of sin itself, was the question that engaged his attention and which he regarded as having practical value.

Chalmers accepted the third chapter of Genesis as containing the first account of sin's entrance into the world. Though the record does not say that Adam's first sin entailed a sinfulness on himself and all his posterity, the consequences of his yielding to temptation were sufficient to indicate a lasting effect on him and all humanity--"all the men who are born sin because of Adam's transgression."<sup>2</sup> Chalmers accumulated a number of testimonies from the Old and New Testaments which supported his interpretation of the Genesis story.<sup>3</sup> The immediate effect on Adam was that his covenant with God was broken--making him a transgressor against the will of God, creating a great moral revolution in his heart, and causing

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 358.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 360. Cf. IV, 147.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VII, 359 ff.

his mind to recoil from the thought of God. As Adam was the first man, and in some sense the representative of humanity, then his sinfulness naturally passed on to all men, and the universality of sin in every age is the result.<sup>1</sup> Man is a sinner solely "in virtue of his being a man," because of his "native tendency" or his "disposition from birth."<sup>2</sup> References from Job, or Psalms, or the writings of Saint Paul, substantiate this view, and many phenomena in nature, such as the physiological succession of characteristics, offer abundant analogies.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Chalmers was consistent with the traditional view of original sin, that because of our kinship with Adam, we are all born with a tendency to sin.<sup>4</sup> "There is something in the very make and mechanism of his nature which causes him to be a sinner--a moral virus infused into the first formation of each individual who is now born into the world."<sup>5</sup> To distinguish between original and actual sin, he wrote:

The one is the tendency to sin in the constitution--the other is the outbreaking of that tendency in the conduct; and if sinful conduct be universal, we infer a sinful constitution to be universal also.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> PW, VI, 162 ff.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 363.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 365.

<sup>4</sup> Chalmers implied a preference for the view of a natural kinship when he expressed his lack of sympathy with those who dogmatize beyond Scripture "with their confident reasonings, on the terms of the federal relationship between God as the lawgiver, and Adam as the head and representative of all his posterity." Ibid., p. 435.

<sup>5</sup> SW, I, 233.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

An attempt to trace the origin of sin in an individual beyond the tendency to sin was of little value to Chalmers, for he enthusiastically accepted the teaching of Jonathan Edwards that the morality of an act or a disposition lies not in the origin or the cause, but in the nature of it.<sup>1</sup>

In adverting to the distinction between original sin and actual sin among men, he observed that Scripture affirms both, but even by the light of our own observation, original sin may be induced from actual:

When we say that all men have sinned, it is on the basis of their actual sins that we are enabled to speak in terms of such generality. When we say that in all men there is a prior tendency to sin, we are but resolving this general fact into its principle or cause.<sup>2</sup>

Though Chalmers refused to delve beyond the Genesis narrative for the ultimate source of sin, he was able from that account to trace the immediate cause of sin back to Satan.<sup>3</sup> He felt that it was bad philosophy to deny such a being and that it was even worse theology to deny the existence of one so definitely referred to in Scripture. The reality of the tempter in the Garden of Eden is as firmly established as the reality of the temptation. And the importance of giving prominence to the part that Satan played in the corruption of our species is enhanced when viewed in

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VIII, 112 ff. Cf. Jonathan Edwards, "Freedom of the Will," Works, II, 119 ff.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 366.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 368 ff.

relation to the redemptive work of Christ. "The object on which He came was the overthrow of Satan," Chalmers wrote, and it should be remembered that "there are mighty potentates, though to us invisible, engaged in a warfare, which has for its object the moral ascendancy of the one or the other, over the family of mankind."<sup>1</sup>

### SINFULNESS OF MAN

At the very core of his whole system of Christian truth was the simple proposition that MAN IS A SINNER. Chalmers cared little about investigating the metaphysical nature of sin; he cared less about considering sin in the abstract. What was most important to him was establishing the fact of the diseased condition of all men in order to lead them to a remedy.

He found that this fundamental article of our faith is established by a two-fold witness--the light of nature and the light of Scripture.<sup>2</sup> Natural religion gives us the power of discernment, whereby, antecedent to and apart from Christian revelation, meaning is given to the distinction between right and wrong, good and evil. Thus, man's natural conscience

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 369. According to Chalmers, this doctrine of "a great Satanic adversary," "a created spirit," should not be regarded as having anything in common with the doctrine of Manicheism, or of two eternal principles of good and evil which share the universe between them. Ibid., p. 375. Cf. III, 94 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See sermon on "The Doctrine of Human Depravity," PW, VI, 162 ff.

informs him of his own sin, and from observation one may legitimately conclude that all men come short of entire and absolute virtue.<sup>1</sup>

With certain "stern theologians" who made an extreme charge of "total degeneracy" among all non-Christians, Chalmers had little patience. He recognized in all men a certain "native goodness," expressed in their integrity, honor, generosity, etc. Such virtue exists "as a substantive reality in the hearts and habits of many an individual who does what is right because of a spontaneous preference which impels him to it, and avoids what is wrong because of an unconquerable repugnance, and the moral discomfort which would attend its perpetration."<sup>2</sup> But how does this claim tally with the terms of degradation in which the Bible refers to man in general? To meet this difficulty Chalmers applied his distinction between the social and the divine standards. "Terrestrial virtue" is based on the duty man owes to man, apart from any consideration of God, "celestial virtue" on the duty man owes to God. The two are "palpably different," but because of the Bible's primary concern for the latter, any superiority in the realm of the former sphere of relations is to little or no avail when brought under judgment for

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 323--5. Cf. V, 134. Supra, p. 132, where Chalmers suggested as the primary use of natural theology the making known to man his sin.

<sup>2</sup> SW VII 326.

failing to measure up to the celestial demands.<sup>1</sup> As he expressed in his *Commercial Discourses*, "good works" by natural man "want the great moral infusion which makes them valuable. There is nothing of God in them; having neither His will for their principle, nor the advancement of any one cause which His heart is set upon for their object."<sup>2</sup>

To support the voice of conscience is the voice of Scripture, and in the third chapter of *Romans*, Chalmers found the clearest affirmation of the sinfulness of man. Since one scriptural statement formed a general truth for him, there was no need for further elaboration on the light of Christian revelation. Nevertheless, he suggested many other proof-texts and concluded his brief discussion in this way:

Christianity in its very essence is the religion of sinners; and the sinfulness of all men is the very basis on which the remedial system of the gospel is proposed for the acceptance of the world."<sup>3</sup>

Though Chalmers failed to give a systematic presentation of the nature of sin, we are able to garner from his writings certain thoughts that give us an impression of his conception of sin. In harmony with the view of Augustine,<sup>4</sup> and following the teaching of Thomas Reid,<sup>5</sup> he insisted on the voluntary nature of sin. Before an act, or a disposition, or a mental

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 327 ff.

<sup>2</sup> SW, III, 329. Cf. IV, 433--4.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VII, 336.

<sup>4</sup> See H. R. Mackintosh, "Sin," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, XI, 539 ff.

<sup>5</sup> SW, XII, 99 ff.

state of whatever kind, can become susceptible of moral designation,

the will must have somehow had to do with it, either as an immediate or remote antecedent, which gave occasion or birth to the thing in question. This is a proposition which requires no argument to carry it, for it must command the instant assent of every conscience.<sup>1</sup>

The will is so related to the faculty of attention, he continued, that by determining what objects are allowed to stimulate our intellectual and emotional faculties, a moral quality can be assigned to our thoughts and feelings as well as to our outward acts. "Attention becomes the great instrument of moral discipline,"<sup>2</sup> for it is through this faculty that the volitional affects the intellectual and the emotional. With such a psychological analysis of the different faculties of man, Chalmers was able to focus on the will the responsibility for moral choices. As a philosophical necessitarian, he was unable to assign real freedom to man's will, but in discussing the relation of sin to man's volitional activity, he hesitated to speak of man's will as being bound, as had Augustine. Elsewhere, though, he could but conclude that man is so totally corrupt that "apart from and anterior to the operation of God's Spirit, he can contribute nothing even to the first movements of a saving change upon himself. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

The ethical character of sin was usually accentuated

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 23.

<sup>2</sup> SW, XII, 131.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VIII, 84--5.

by Chalmers. His strong emphasis on God's moral government led him often to speak of sin as the voluntary transgression of the law of God, as expressed in our consciences and in Scripture. In referring to the need for convicting men of their sin, he wrote:

The Bible in effect affirms our sinfulness, when it affirms the high demands and prerogatives of a law which every enlightened conscience must feel that we have fallen from. There is not, therefore, a likelier expedient than a close and faithful preaching of the law, for giving success and efficacy to the preaching of the gospel. . . . It is thus that [placed before] the ethical system of the Bible, . . . must he perceive how immeasurably low his moral position is beneath the standard of its immutable and all-perfect law.<sup>1</sup>

This statement brought out the legal flavor so often present in his references to sin, especially when they related to man's need of reconciliation with God. Disobedience to the law of God was emphasized in both lectures and sermons, but in his devotional writings the religious and personal character of sin was given more attention.<sup>2</sup> The spotlight seemed to move from the disobedience of God's law to what Luther called a "faithless heart,"<sup>3</sup> and in his own spiritual experience sin was regarded more as a want of faith, the failure to fear and love and trust God. The subjective aspect of sin became manifest along with the objective.

One further point should be made in connection with

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 342--3.

<sup>2</sup> For examples, see PW, IV, 36, 49, 54, 63; V, 9, 15, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Mackintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 540.

Chalmers' conception of sin. In his Scottish Theology and Theologians, James Walker spoke of Chalmers' accepting a nonentitive view of sin, and from the context, "nonentitive" is understood to denominate sin as simply a negation of good.<sup>1</sup> Nowhere did Chalmers directly affirm or deny the existence of sin as an entity, but there is evidence to indicate that for him sin was more than mere privation. In his discussion of God's part in predestination, he did seek to vindicate the Deity from the charge of having been the author of sin, or the cause of evil, by suggesting several "transcendental speculations" (for which he had very little use). One of these so-called speculations was described by Augustine, emphasizing the privative character of evil, which, at the most, could only "neutralize the objections of infidelity," said Chalmers.<sup>2</sup> Walker's conclusion could not stand on this section of the Institutes alone, and the evidence in all the writings of Chalmers suggests a positive force in sin.

In support of this claim, we would first point to Chalmers' strong emphasis on the voluntary nature of sin, whereby man deliberately chooses the worse when he could have chosen the better.<sup>3</sup> In accentuating our wilful disobedience of the

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<sup>1</sup> James Walker, Scottish Theology and Theologians, pp. 59 ff.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VIII, 165 ff. Cf. Mackintosh, op. cit., pp. 539 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Chalmers seemed to be in agreement with the view as stated by Tennant: ". . . the fact of deliberate choosing of the worse when the better course is both known and possible. This is to be called by no other name than sin. Here at least is something inexcusable, something vile and hateful; and it is neither charitable nor compassionate to speak of it in language less severe." F. R. Tennant, The Concept of Sin, p. 247.

law of God, Chalmers sounded a positive note in his conception of sin. Furthermore, in suggesting to his students a technique for convincing men of their sin, he advised them first to make the charge of being devoid of godliness, and then to try to carry the listeners along to show them that such a condition, even though unrecognized, is actually the same as being despiteful toward God.<sup>1</sup> As to the necessary relation of these two charges, he said:

The charge more heinous and aggravated than the former, not of our being without God, but of our being against God, may also be rendered into one word, even hatred; and which if once fastened and made good, would make us out to be, not the forgetters of God only, but greatly more revolting than this, the haters of God.<sup>2</sup>

In speaking of "the best man upon earth who has not been Christianized," Chalmers wrote:

The Being who made him is disowned by him. . . . The creature has broken loose from the Creator; and, unmindful of his ceaseless and intimate dependence on the Power who gave him birth, he walks in the counsel of his own heart, and after the sight of his own eyes. He has assumed the sovereign guidance of himself; and in so doing he has usurped the rightful sovereignty of his Maker.<sup>3</sup>

Further reference, especially to his devotional works, could be supplied to indicate the trend of Chalmers' thinking in regard to the positive force of sin, and they blend together in refuting the charge of Walker, for which there is little or no evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 343 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 352.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 430.

GUILT OF MAN

In viewing the sinfulness of man, we look at his moral state as a thing of fact, being in the category of quid est; in viewing the guilt of man, we look at his moral state as a thing of desert, in the category of quid oportet.<sup>1</sup> Distinguishing between the two, Chalmers set out to show that the guilt of man has the same two-fold witness as his sinfulness--natural conscience and Scripture. By nature man has a sense of right and wrong, and when he chooses the latter, he is remonstrated by adverse moral judgment, giving him a sense of guilt for the actual sin. Thus, it is quite evident, thought Chalmers, that "we have a voucher or testimony in man himself, not only for his being in a state of corruption, but for his being in a state of guiltiness."<sup>2</sup>

But to what has natural theology to testify in connection with guilt for original sin? Identifying the latter with "a prior tendency to sin," Chalmers felt that he was justified in inferring the original from the actual, for since the universality of sinning is generally recognized, it must follow that the disposition to sin is also universal.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 378.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 379. Chalmers claimed that we all have enough light in the natural conscience to awaken a sense of guilt, which points to the place of junction between natural and Christian theology. Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> SW, I, 245.

judgment should be brought not only on the act, but upon the cause of the act--that is, the disposition, thus making both actual and original sin the partners of guilt. There should be no necessity to proceed to the more transcendental question, What prompted the disposition? The important implication was that a pronouncement of guilt on both disposition to sin and on the act of sinning "leaves the real character and desert of the sins themselves just where it found them--the rightful object of blame or moral disapprobation, the rightful object of condemnation and punishment."<sup>1</sup> In this discussion Chalmers restricted the meaning of original sin to man's own disposition to sin and made no attempt to show the relation between the inherited tendency and the sin of Adam.

Chalmers was sensitive to the difficulty of ascribing guilt to original sin. What about the physical or mechanical necessity if antecedent influences cause sin? Is there not a force implied here which would remove responsibility? He hoped to "unravel this confusion" in his treatment of predestination, but one point could here be made to help remove the difficulty. He adverted to a distinction between two kinds of force in relation to the will. There is the force ab extra, compelling a man against his will, thus removing all moral characteristics of action. And there is a force ab intra, compelling a man with his will, which Chalmers believed would "appeal to the

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 383.

moral sense and consciences of men."<sup>1</sup>

"The only necessity which excuses a man for doing what is evil is a necessity that forces him by an external violence to do it, against the bent of his will struggling most honestly and determinedly to resist it. But if it be with the bent of the will, . . . then such a necessity as this . . . just aggravates it the more, and stamps upon it, in all plain moral estimation, a character of more foul atrocity."<sup>2</sup>

As such a distinction should be applicable for a necessity within the Godhead, he reasoned, why should it not have force when necessity in connection with man is under consideration? Whatever estimate be given to this point, he was insistent that it was in the nature of an evil disposition, and not in its cause, that the guilt lay.<sup>3</sup>

The law of the heart and the law of revelation are completely at one in testifying to man's guilt, said Chalmers, but the latter gives us a fuller explanation of our judgment and convinces us more effectively of its reality. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" is the form in which Scripture announces to us the punishment for our actual sins. In the observation of Chalmers, the Bible tells us this:

. . . in virtue of their descent from Adam all men have a corrupt nature transmitted by him or derived from him; and it also tells us that for the sins which because of this nature each man perpetrates, each man is personally responsible.<sup>4</sup>

Each man is to be held guilty because of his own iniquities; and each man is to be condemned and to suffer because of his own guilt.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Ibid., p. 384.

2 SW, I, 253.

3 SW, VII, 385.

4 Ibid., p. 390.

5 Ibid., p. 388.

As to our guilt for original sin, Chalmers wrote: "We come into the world with the principles of sin and condemnation upon us; and, in the congenial atmosphere of this world's example, these ripen fast for the execution of the sentence."<sup>1</sup> In addition, he had become convinced that the Bible "shoots ahead" of nature to inform us of our guilt for the sin of the first man. When he wrote his commentary on Romans, Chalmers favored a form of mediate imputation, regarding man not as a sharer in the guilt of Adam's sin, but primarily as a sharer in a like guilt because he shares a like corruption which Adam took on at the moment of his fall and passes on to all men.<sup>2</sup> In his Institutes Chalmers rejected this view, arguing that it was inconsistent with the findings of Scripture and of experience, especially in the definite parallelisms in Scripture between the imputation of Adam's guilt and of Christ's righteousness, and concluding with an affirmation of his belief in the immediate imputation of Adam's guilt to all men.<sup>3</sup> "We bring a guilt with us into the world, and as one of the direct consequences thereof, we bring a corruption with us into the world also."<sup>4</sup> Immediate imputation is a judicial act of God, in

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<sup>1</sup> SW, III, 389.

<sup>2</sup> SW, I, 256 ff. See Jonathan Edwards, "The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended, Works, II, 476 ff.

<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy that the reviewer of Chalmers' Lectures on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans in The Presbyterian Review and Religious Journal, February 1838, pp. 507 ff., was critical of the author's view of imputation and suggested that he was unscriptural at this point.

<sup>4</sup> SW, VII, 407.

contrast to the sovereign act of mediate imputation, and though we do not understand the rationale of such a procedure, we must accept it for such is the clear teaching of Scripture. The view is not contrary to reason, but above reason, he concluded.<sup>1</sup> Immediate imputation he reckoned to be theologically important because its rejection might involve the rejection of the doctrine of imputation of Christ's righteousness; practically it was important for it was helpful in commencing and confirming our faith in the "all-precious doctrine of our righteousness in Christ."<sup>2</sup>

#### PULPIT TREATMENT

"The rudimental lesson of Christianity is to convince of sin,"<sup>3</sup> wrote Chalmers, so it was most important that this subject be handled most effectively in the pulpit. He pointed his students to the order of Saint Paul's argument in the Epistle to the Romans in regard to sin, and suggested this as an example for a wise treatment.<sup>4</sup> It was out of his own pulpit experience that these admonitions had sprung, and his own treatment of sin in the pulpit substantiated those views expressed in the chair.

Following the Apostle, we should first speak to men of

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 400 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 409 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 336.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 442 ff.

their own sin and their own sinfulness. Their consciences tell them of their transgressions, and the proclamation of God's law from God's book not only presents them with the high demands of God for righteousness, but also revives the almost "extinct sensibility of conscience."<sup>1</sup> "It is by an action and reaction between these two elements, the Bible and the conscience, that the light is struck out which reveals Christianity to the soul."<sup>2</sup>

The Bible in effect affirms our sinfulness, when it affirms the high demands and prerogatives of a law which every enlightened conscience must feel that we have fallen from. There is not, therefore, a likelier expedient than a close and faithful preaching of the law, for giving success and efficacy to the preaching of the gospel.<sup>3</sup>

In our zeal to propound the depravity of man's nature, we must be careful to discriminate between "terrestrial virtue" and celestial virtue." Many may be the virtues of our listeners, so we must show them "that there exists in the bosom of unregenerate man no affection or no affinity to God . . . ."<sup>4</sup> Social virtues make a man more acceptable in society, but when brought before God, they become so insignificant that it is like measuring the distance to the sun from the top of a mountain rather than from the foot. How insignificant are these terrestrial distances!<sup>5</sup> Even in pointing to their ungodliness, we should show discretion, and not charge them with

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 416.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 422.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 342. See sermon on "The Use of Law," Select Sermons, pp. 77 ff.

<sup>4</sup> SW, IV, 433--4.

<sup>5</sup> SW, VII, 357. See sermons on "An Estimate of the Morality that is without Godliness," IV, 60 ff.; and "On the Mercantile Virtues which may Exist without the Influence of Christianity," III, 123 ff.

hating God, lest in "parading our orthodoxy," we drive away seekers. And in the end, we may be able to convince our congregation that in being without God, they are actually against God.<sup>1</sup>

After telling man of his sin and sinfulness, and using the sanction of the law to enforce his liability for punishment, we should present Jesus Christ as He is offered in the gospel, and whose righteousness is imputed to those who believe. Only then should we tell our people of the imputation of Adam's guilt.

It is after they have become heirs of Christ, and partakers with Him in the rewards of the obedience of the second Adam, that they are told of their guilt and corruption by nature, as having been the analogous forfeitures incurred by the disobedience of the first Adam. . . ."2

It is also important that we remember the work of the Holy Spirit in our effort to convince men of their sin and sinfulness. The Bible tells us the law of God; the Spirit opens our eyes to an understanding of it. Conscience bids us acknowledge what is right; the Spirit enlightens conscience as to our great debt to God. The Bible charges man with deficiencies; the Spirit makes us to see its personal application.

The Spirit of God has absolute control over the mechanism of the spirit of man; and yet, without disturbance to the operations of the laws of that mechanism--without violence done to any of its principles or any of its powers, He does not traverse the sequences or principles of the mental philosophy--He stimulates and gives a right direction to them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 352.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 442.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 421. See sermon on "The Necessity of the Spirit to Give Effect to the Preaching of the Gospel," IV, 1 ff.

In the practical treatment of sin, we have this admonition to follow: "Let us work, then, as if man did all--let us pray as if God did all."<sup>1</sup>

## II. SALVATION

When a man becomes convinced of his diseased condition, he begins to search for a remedy. Out of his own spiritual experience Chalmers found the only sufficient remedy in the salvation of the Great Physician, and he firmly believed this same medicine was the only sufficient remedy for all men. The remedy was "the old, old story," which needed no additions or subtractions, he was sure. It was necessary, though, to prepare the prescription as attractively as possible. With such an approach, we can expect to find very little that is original in the content of the remedy; only when we observe the arrangement and the presentation of the remedy do we meet with the uniqueness of Chalmers.

Running through his whole idea of salvation were two aspects of the righteousness demanded of us by God and offered to us in Christ. Somewhat parallel to the confessional concepts of justification and sanctification, they were denominated by Chalmers as "a legal right" and "a moral rightness." From Gurney's Chalmeriana we have in Chalmers' own words a summary of his view of salvation, which sets the stage for all

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 424.

further consideration:

It is of the highest importance to distinguish between right and rightness. The former word is used in a legal and forensic sense, to designate the claim which we possess upon any privilege; but 'rightness,' from the adjective 'right,' properly describes the conduct and character of the man. It is utterly impossible for any man to obtain a right--a legal or forensic claim--to an entrance into future happiness, by any works of his own. . . . When we are justified by faith in the crucified Redeemer--when the righteousness of Him who meritoriously fulfilled the whole law is imputed to us--then do we become invested with our right to the heavenly inheritance. . . . But unless there be a practical rightness, as well as a legal right, you will never be fit for the exercises and joys of heaven. You must be made meet for your eternal inheritance before you can enjoy it; you must yourselves be holy, before you can be fitted for the happiness of which holiness is the substance. . . . Our faith in Jesus can never be the means of imparting this right to us, unless it be of such a nature as to produce the rightness which qualifies for the enjoyment.<sup>1</sup>

Righteousness is judicially understood when associated with the doctrine of justification, and morally understood when associated with the doctrine of sanctification.<sup>2</sup> In the former case our righteousness is imputed and perfect, and delivers us from the guilt of sin. In the latter it is personal and imperfect, and delivers us from the power of sin.<sup>3</sup> These two aspects of our righteousness are so interrelated, though, that it is wise not to emphasize one without giving due stress to its partner. They are distinguished, but not separated in our salvation. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say of Chal-

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph John Gurney, Chalmeriana, pp. 105--7. (Italics are mine.) Cf. SW, VI, 544.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 32.

<sup>3</sup> SW, IV, 249.

mers' view that theoretically they are distinguishable, but practically they are not. They are but two terms to designate two phases of one great fact.<sup>1</sup>

#### A. A LEGAL RIGHT

#### RECONCILIATION

The first step in Chalmers' demonstration of our legal right dealt with the atonement, understood in a broad sense, and the task of interpreting his view is made difficult by his frequent use of "atonement" in a much narrower sense. He recognized a bare possibility of "embryo conceptions" of the atonement in the natural conscience, but they come to light only when Scripture is presented ab extra. The necessity of the atonement should not be discussed before the atonement itself,<sup>2</sup> and only in the Christian revelation do we find the facts of the atonement presented--"the doctrine of God's remedy for the disease, of the atonement rendered by His Son Jesus Christ, is educible from Scripture alone."<sup>3</sup>

To the various scriptural representations of the atonement Chalmers applied his meager form of exegesis, finding several aspects of truth which should be blended in a total interpretation. He recognized in the Old Testament sacrifices a preparation for the Christian doctrine of the atone-

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VI, 544. Cf. PW, VI, 135.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 452.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 455.

ment. They were shadows or types of the real sacrifice.<sup>1</sup> Of much more importance to Chalmers was a study of Hebrew and Greek words representing the atonement--their interpretation being chiefly from a contextual and doctrinal point of view.<sup>2</sup>

The verb ἀλλάσσω and its derivatives suggested the idea of a change of relationships, and from the context in which they are generally used they can apply only to a change from enmity to friendship. Their emphasis is on the effect, rather than on the nature of the atonement, and they actually refer more to the act of reconciliation, the atonement having laid the basis for bridging the gap.<sup>3</sup> Primarily, reconciliation applies to the offended party:

That point of time in the series of general history at which reconciliation was made, was when our Saviour said that it was finished, and gave up the ghost. God may be said to have then become reconciled to the world, in as far as he was ready to enter into agreement with all who drew nigh in the name of the great propitiation.<sup>4</sup>

Secondarily, reconciliation is not completed without the concurrence of the offending party, "which is done by believing in Christ, whereupon the enmity in their hearts toward God is done away."<sup>5</sup>

In the words λύω and λύτρον, and their counterpart in the Hebrew, קָדַשׁ, the ransom idea in the atonement was

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1 SW, VIII, 395 ff.

2 SW, VII, 470.

3 Ibid., p. 473.

4 Thomas Chalmers, Sermons Preached in St. John's Church, Glasgow, p. 93.

5 SW, VII, 471.

seen by Chalmers. Our forgiveness and our inheritance are not only bestowed, but purchased.<sup>1</sup>

In the Greek δικαιοσύνη, we have the positive side of Christ's work emphasized, bringing out its forensic relation to us.<sup>2</sup>

The sacrificial aspect of the atonement comes to light especially in a study of the Epistle to the Hebrews, particularly in the various forms of ἱλασμός. "To make reconciliation for the sins of the people," (Hebrews 2:17) is the same as to avert the displeasure incurred by the sins of the people."<sup>3</sup> From I John 4:10, "we learn that Christ made God propitious to us."<sup>4</sup> No less costly sacrifice would have sufficed for the restoration of sinners--"the expiation of sin required the offering up of a Divine sacrifice, and that nothing short of it could reconciliation have been effected between the transgressor of the law and the offended Lawgiver."<sup>5</sup>

In compiling the multitudinous passages on the subject of reconciliation, Chalmers recognized a twofold aspect that God had in view in bringing salvation to man: one retrospective, referring to the evil from which that grace brings deliverance; the other prospective, referring to the good which it bestows. In a sense this division might be called

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1 Ibid., pp. 475--6.

2 Ibid., p. 489 ff.

3 Ibid., p. 477.

4 Ibid., p. 478.

5 SW, VIII, 322.

arbitrary, and yet it represents two real phases of one great fact.

The retrospective feature of reconciliation is based on the "doctrine of the atonement" and has to do with our "negative justification." The prospective feature is based on the "doctrine of imputed righteousness" and is concerned with our "positive justification."

. . . Christ hath not only suffered for us, but served for us. By the doctrine of the atonement, I am told that He hath borne for sinners their punishment, so as to rescue them from hell; and by the doctrine of the imputed righteousness, I am told that He has earned for sinners a right which entitles them to heaven. . . . By the one [negative justification] we are relieved from the penalties of transgression, by the other [positive justification] we obtain a part and an interest in the promises of obedience. To achieve the first, Christ is said to have borne the chastisement of our peace; to achieve the second, Christ is said to have fulfilled all righteousness.<sup>1</sup>

The distinction is clearly made here between the negative and positive aspects of the reconciling work of Christ and between the respective benefits that are judicially conferred upon us. We are saved from hell; we are saved for heaven.

In recommending the definition of justification given in the Shorter Catechism as a support for this distinction, Chalmers made one of his rare recommendations of the Westminster Standards.<sup>2</sup> More important to him, though, was the conviction that this distinction was definitely scriptural.

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 482. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 510 ff.; VIII, 414 ff.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VIII, 415. See Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 33.

The negative aspect is illustrated in such passages as I Samuel 29:4; Matthew 5:24; Romans 5:10; I Corinthians 7:11; II Corinthians 5:18--20; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20,21.<sup>1</sup> The positive is brought out in John 3:36; 5:24; Acts 26:18; Romans 5:1,2; I Corinthians 1:30.<sup>2</sup> The keyword for the former is ἀπολύτρωσις, for the latter δικαιοσύνη. The New Testament sometimes relates the death of Christ to the negative feature and His resurrection to the positive.<sup>3</sup> We may be justified in accepting the similar distinction between the active and passive righteousness of Christ,<sup>4</sup> but Chalmers could find no such scriptural basis for the corresponding distinction between Christ's active and passive obedience from which he was repelled by its scholastic flavor. The distinction of importance, in the words of Jonathan Edwards, was that "the death of Christ did not only make atonement, but also merited eternal life; and hence . . . by the blood of Christ we are not only redeemed from sin, but redeemed unto God."<sup>5</sup>

Chalmers' views on the nature of the atonement are brought out in the chapter entitled "On the Satisfaction that had to be Rendered to the Truth and Justice of God, ere that Sinners could be Re-admitted into Favour." The title is very

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 471 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 489 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 499.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 493. Chalmers found this distinction emphasized in Jonathan Edwards' sermon on "Justification by Faith Alone." VII, 484 ff. McLeod Campbell made a similar distinction in The Nature of the Atonement, pp. 11 ff., though the composition of the negative and positive phases was different.

indicative of its scope. If God's justice and truth are not satisfied, then God's moral government is threatened and the restraints of a moral government are either wholly unfelt, or are of no practical efficacy in the world. An atonement expressing only the mercy of God would not do justice to the whole character of God.<sup>1</sup> In the cross of Christ mercy and justice meet: the penalty for sin is not recalled, but transferred.<sup>2</sup> The common property in both retrospective and prospective aspects of the atonement is a foundation on the union of God's benevolence and righteousness.<sup>3</sup> Only on such a basis can an interpretation of the atonement be made that will satisfy the demands of our moral nature.<sup>4</sup>

From this summary we can easily detect the large place that Chalmers gave to the expression of God's righteousness in the cross. The strong emphasis on conscience in his natural theology prepared the way for his great stress on the legal standing given in Christ. His interpretation reflects some influence from the "governmental theory," but his frequent reference to the demands of God's holiness being met in the atonement is more consistent with Strong's statement of the "ethical theory": "The atonement is therefore a satisfaction of the ethical demand of the divine nature, by

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 495.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 496.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 483--4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 501.

the substitution of Christ's penal sufferings for the punishment of the guilty."<sup>1</sup> Such an interpretation gives to the atonement almost an entirely objective significance for us, but in its bearing on our "moral rightness," Chalmers recognized a profound subjective significance. This was suggested in his famous sermon on "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection":

It is the atonement of the cross reconciling the holiness of the lawgiver with the safety of the offender, that hath opened the way for a sanctifying influence into the sinner's heart, and he can take a kindred impression from the character of God now brought nigh, and now at peace with him.<sup>2</sup>

In his work on The Nature of the Atonement, McLeod Campbell stated that "Doctor Chalmers is historically justified in saying, that such a standing as he conceives we are called to take, in virtue of the imputation of our sins to Christ, and of His righteousness to us, will meet the demands of conscience to a certain extent awakened only. . . ." <sup>3</sup> But Campbell went on to point out that "conscience is not fully awakened in us who are God's offspring, until the orphan condition to which sin has reduced us is revealed in us, and the cry arises in spirit, if not in form of words, 'shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.'" <sup>4</sup> For Chalmers, it was the idea of God as Lawgiver or Judge that is the primary thought

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<sup>1</sup> Augustus Hopkins Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 410.

<sup>2</sup> SW, III, 259.

<sup>3</sup> John McLeod Campbell, The Nature of the Atonement, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> Loc. cit.

of awakened sinners, and a great error it is to merge the Lawgiver into the Father.<sup>1</sup> Campbell would not dispute this point, but in stressing that "it is only by the revelation of the Father that God succeeds in realising the will of the Lawgiver in men,"<sup>2</sup> Campbell placed the stronger focus on the Fatherhood of God, a determinative factor in the difference between their interpretations of the atonement.

This "legal note" that stood out so prominently in his lectures prevailed in most of his sermons, but occasionally there broke through the note that Campbell criticized Chalmers for neglecting--that the basic meaning of the cross was a revelation of God's love to men. In his sermon on "God Is Love," Chalmers said:

In this glorious spectacle [the cross of Christ] do we see the mystery resolved; and the compassion of the parent meeting in fullest harmony, with the now asserted, the now vindicated prerogatives of the lawgiver. We **there** behold justice satisfied and mercy made sure. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a halo of all the attributes; and yet the pre-eminent manifestation there is of God as love--for it is love, not only rejoicing over all the works, but shrined in full consent while shedding enhanced lustre amidst all the perfections of the divine nature.<sup>3</sup>

### THE GOSPEL OFFER

On the universality of Christian salvation Chalmers had very definite convictions that he frequently expounded

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VII, 503--4.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> SW, IV, 445.

from both chair and pulpit. He disagreed with the Universalists who accepted a universality in point of actual effect and with the Arminians who accepted a universality in point of necessary effect. Nor did he agree with "certain ultra-Calvinists" who denied a universality in point of proposition.<sup>1</sup> By the universality of Christian salvation Chalmers meant that the offer of the gospel could be and should be made to all men.

I take this early opportunity, then, of avowing my conviction, that Calvinist though I be, I hold there is nothing in Calvinism which should lay an arrest on the Christian minister, when he plies with the calls and invitations of the gospel, not the whole congregation only whom he is addressing, but every individual of that congregation, assuring him specifically, that if he is willing to be saved, God is still more willing to save him, laying before him an open way to heaven, which he is welcome. . . .<sup>2</sup>

. . . Paul speaks of repentance being a call addressed to all men everywhere. . . . All men everywhere is an expression which bespeaks an individual as well as national universality of offer, though not a universality of final and effectual salvation.<sup>3</sup>

The offer should be made as personally and individually as possible. It is a mistake that some theologians "would make the gospel of Jesus Christ graze, as it were, over the heads of the whole species without lighting upon one of them, fearful of transmuting the general into the particular. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

We should like each individual of the world's population to assume specially for himself every passage in the Bible where Christ is held forth generally to men or generally to sinners; and should assure him that, did he only proceed upon these, he would infallibly be saved.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VIII, 421--2, 433.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 422--3. Cf. p. 425; VII, 535--6, 554.

<sup>3</sup> PW, IV, 173.

<sup>4</sup> SW, VII, 577.

<sup>5</sup> SW, VIII, 182--3. Cf. VII, 322; Memoirs, IV, 363.

According to Chalmers, every sermon should sound the evangelistic note.<sup>1</sup> The offer should be made to all with great earnestness; if it is refused, then the consequences of an "alternative dispensation" should be presented.<sup>2</sup> Present the goodness of God first--then His severity.<sup>3</sup> Man's natural inability to respond should not prevent our making the offer in full force:

The natural inability of man to accept the offers of the gospel no more supersedes the duty of the offerer than the impotency of the withered hand superseded the command of our Saviour that it should be stretched forth. Power was given in this instance along with the command, and it is given still along with the preaching of the gospel.<sup>4</sup>

Whether the benefit of Christ's death extended to those who never heard of it was an open question with Chalmers.<sup>5</sup> Whatever our attitude, it should not hamper our missionary activity.

I look upon the question of the salvability of the heathen as a terra incognita, which it is not my business to investigate. . . . I would only remark that there was a sufficient difference between the future prospects of the heathen and those of Christian believers to justify the utmost extent and ardency of missionary exertions.<sup>6</sup>

A study of Chalmers' sermons shows his pulpit admonitions to be consistent with those of the classroom. Hanna recorded this observation:

. . . the most marked characteristic of his pulpit ministrations after his conversion was the frequency and fervour with which he held out to sinners Christ and His salvation

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1 SW, VII, 322.

2 SW, VIII, 297.

3 SW, IV, 227, 244.

4 Letter to Mr. Morgan, 1 March 1827, Memoirs, II, 529.

5 SW, VI, 545--6.

6 Gurney, op. cit., p. 119.

as God's free gift, which it was their privilege and their duty at once and most gratefully to accept. . . . "he would bend over the pulpit," said one of his old hearers, "and press us to take the gift, as if he held it that moment in his hand, and would not be satisfied till every one of us has got possession of it."<sup>1</sup>

In reading his sermons one can almost visualize his outstretched hand--offering so freely and fully to each one the gospel of Christ. No example illustrates his very personal invitation better than one from a sermon delivered a few days before his death. After presenting the plan of salvation, he concluded:

Not one among you should forbear to venture his confidence, for fear of the insufficiency of the sacrifice. "Good will to man" was the Angels' advent cry. "Good will to man." No one individual need be shut out, let him be who or what he may. We cheer him on,--HE IS A MAN:--we make no exception.<sup>2</sup>

In criticizing Haldane's view of the gospel offer, Chalmers said:

I think that the word world, as applied in Scripture to the sacrifice of Christ, has been unnecessarily restricted; the common way of explaining it is, that it simply includes Gentiles as well as Jews. . . . The text to which I allude is, that "God commandeth all men, everywhere to repent." . . . In the offer of the gospel, we must make no limitation whatever. I compare the world to a multitude of iron filings in a vessel, and the gospel to a magnet. The minister of the gospel is to bring the magnet into contact with them all: the secret agency of God is to produce the attraction.<sup>3</sup>

When questioned about the objection of the sinner as to whether

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, I, 420--1.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Chalmers, The Fulness and Freeness of the Gospel Message, May 1847, p. 14. In interpreting this passage from Luke 2:14, Chalmers would have done well to study the original εἰρήνη ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας. For other examples of his pulpit invitations see SW, IV, 124--5, 446--7; III, 389.

<sup>3</sup> Memoirs, IV, 512.

he is elect, Chalmers replied: "That is cutting before the point. I am predestinarian: my theology is that of Jonathan Edwards. . . . Yes, a Necessitarian; but I would always wish to be borne in mind a saying of Bishop Butler--viz., 'That we have not so much to inquire what God does, or should do to us, as what are the duties which we owe to Him.'"<sup>1</sup> Here we see the practical coming to the forefront again. If he could not hold his views of predestination and the gospel offer together, he would hold them separately. Intellectually he accepted both; practically he preferred a much stronger light being placed on the universal aspect of the Christian gospel.

In Chalmers' day Scotland was witnessing several ripples on the calm pool of its traditional Calvinism, and the question of the universality of Christian salvation was becoming a live issue. Though Chalmers took no active part in the controversies, his attitude indicated that he was not entirely unsympathetic to the disturbance of the waters. We can attempt no treatment of the views of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen and John McLeod Campbell, the leaders of the new movement; we can offer only a few remarks on Chalmers' response to their views.

In the General Assembly of 1831 Campbell was deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland on the charge of

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 512--3.

holding and teaching the doctrines of universal atonement and pardon and that assurance is of the essence of faith and necessary to salvation.<sup>1</sup> Chalmers took no part in the discussions, and his silence has puzzled historians for the past century.<sup>2</sup> Did he shirk the issue or did he foresee religio-politico events just at hand, as one writer has suggested?<sup>3</sup> Was "the Doctor, par excellence, in the Scottish Church of the time" showing a cowardly streak in refusing to intervene on Campbell's behalf, as Mrs. Oliphant has suggested?<sup>4</sup> There seems to be no real evidence for solving the problem, but perhaps a hint can be detected in a friend's report of a conversation with Chalmers concerning the controversy, especially as it related to Erskine.

He [Chalmers] regrets that there is any controversy, for he thinks there is little difference. That every one is already pardoned he thinks clearly contrary to Scripture. . . . "I don't like," he said, "narrowing the broad basis of the gospel to the pin-point speculations of an individual brain. One thing . . . <sup>1</sup> I fear, I do fear that, the train of his thoughts might ultimately lead Mr. Erskine to doubt the eternity of future punishment. Now that would be going sadly against Scripture."<sup>5</sup>

"Contrary to Scripture" are the key words, and suggest at least one plausible reason for his not defending Campbell.

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, III, 290.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Garrett Bewkes, Legacy of a Christian Mind, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> Robert A. Reid, "The Influence, Direct and Indirect, of the Writings of Erskine of Linlathen on Religious Thought in Scotland," p. 194. Cf. Andrew Drummond's criticism in his book, Edward Irving and His Circle, p. 221.

<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Oliphant, The Life of Edward Irving, p. 293.

<sup>5</sup> Memoirs, III, 247. (Italics are mine.)

If this was the reason, then Chalmers could have cleared himself of many charges by expressing his opinion openly.

There is another side of the picture, though. Why did Chalmers not support the fight for Campbell's deposition? For one thing, he was not a "heresy hunter" and preferred a certain latitude in scriptural interpretation--so long as it remained true to Scripture.<sup>1</sup> Hanna has made a helpful suggestion that "his strong convictions as to the unconditional freeness of the gospel offer, and his substantial agreement with many of the leading doctrines of those generally denominated 'Marrowmen,' disposed him to judge mildly of the errors of Mr. Erskine and Mr. Campbell."<sup>2</sup> In addition, Chalmers did not hesitate to say that could a window have been opened into Campbell's breast, it would have revealed that he did not differ so greatly from many of his brethren in the ministry, as they, looking simply to the evidence of statements and facts, were judicially compelled to believe.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> His generosity to those who differed with him was suggested in a letter to Mr. Morgan, 14 November, 1826--"I should feel the utmost toleration, nay even welcome, for all evangelical Dissenters, and I would not refuse this characteristic to the great bulk of Wesleyan Methodists, though Arminians. They are speculatively wrong on one point, but I do think that many of them have the living spirit of God's own children." Memoirs, II, 528.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs, III, 246.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 291. In a letter to the Countess of Elgin, 2 June 1831, Chalmers gave vent to his inner response to the deposition: "I grieve for poor Campbell. He was probably right in idea, but if he obstinately persist in couching that right idea in a wrong phraseology, he may not be the less dangerous as an expounder of truth. . . . Yet I cannot help being in great heaviness on his account." Correspondence, p. 349.

Chalmers' friendship with Erskine was even more cordial than with Campbell. The 1818 correspondence between Chalmers and Erskine undoubtedly contained the former's recognition of the validity and value of internal evidence.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps both were drawn to each other in carrying on the tradition of the "Marrowmen" in their emphasis on the freeness and fullness of the gospel offer.<sup>2</sup> Though Chalmers could not go all the way with Erskine in his interpretation of the atonement, he seemed to have been indebted to Erskine for certain distinctions and emphases in his presentation of the Christian gospel. He certainly gave no indication of having sympathy with the attacks of his close friend, Andrew Thomson, on Erskine's views. He declared Erskine's The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel to be "one of the most delightful books that ever had been written,"<sup>3</sup> and it might well have been from this work that he developed his treatment of Christian salvation in the terms of "disease" and "remedy."<sup>4</sup> Chalmers' insistence on the union of a moral rightness with a legal right seems

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<sup>1</sup> Supra, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> See E. F. (C. G. M'Crie, editor), The Marrow of Modern Divinity, pp. xv, xxx--xxxii. In a letter to Dr. Rainy of Glasgow, Chalmers spoke of The Marrow of Modern Divinity as "a truly refreshing work" because of the freeness and fullness of the gospel offer. Correspondence, p. 223. In another letter he said: "Had I lived a hundred years ago, I would have joined the Marrow men." Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>3</sup> Memoirs, III, 246. Cf. William Hanna, editor, Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> See Thomas Erskine, The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel, p. 62.

related to Erskine's view that "pardon is not heaven--heaven is not proclaimed to sinners; it belongs only to those who hate sin;"<sup>1</sup> though Chalmers would have stated it thus: "heaven is proclaimed to sinners and belongs only to those who hate sin."<sup>2</sup> His tendency at times almost to fuse justification and sanctification could well have been an outgrowth of Erskine's contention for a more subjective approach to the doctrine of justification.<sup>3</sup> Just how much Chalmers borrowed from Erskine we cannot be too certain, but surely he found a kindred spirit in his effort to present the Christian message as warmth for ~~the~~ heart as well as light for the mind. One investigator correctly observed that "the spirit of inquiry through the writings of Erskine did influence Chalmers to express his Calvinism in a more gracious and winsome form than was the general custom of preachers."<sup>4</sup>

#### JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

In the days prior to his Kilmany awakening, Chalmers had a hearty dislike for the generally accepted doctrines of evangelical Christianity. Through the atonement we receive the forgiveness of sin, but how it operates we cannot tell. One thing is clear--namely, the "orthodox theory" is incredible.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> See Gurney, op. cit., pp. 105--7.

<sup>3</sup> Erskine, op. cit., pp. 91 ff. Cf. Erskine, The Brazen Serpent, p. 149.

<sup>4</sup> Reid, op. cit., p. 197.

In what particular manner the death of our Redeemer effected the remission of our sins, or rather, why that death was made a condition of this remission seems to be an unrevealed point in the Scriptures. Perhaps the God of nature meant to illustrate the purity of his perfection to the children of men; perhaps it was efficacious in promoting the improvement and confirming the virtue of other orders of being.<sup>1</sup>

With regard to the method of a sinner's justification, this was what he taught:

The faith of Christianity is praiseworthy and meritorious only because it is derived from the influence of virtuous sentiments on the mind. . . . Let us tremble to think that anything but virtue can recommend us to the Almighty. True, we wander in the paths of vanity and darkness, and Christ is pointed out to us as our only refuge of guilt; but the acknowledgment of our Saviour, that faith in Him which is essential to our happiness, is brought about by the impulse of moral sentiment, and unless it were so we cannot see how it could ensure to us the favour of heaven.<sup>2</sup>

When "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" became a reality to him, he turned his eyes to behold Him who is our righteousness.<sup>3</sup> "Justification by faith and works" was translated into "justification by faith alone." The theme that rang from chair and pulpit through all his days was clearly set forth. His father's death was a time to reiterate his view of the way of salvation:

I feel . . . that the righteousness of Christ unmixed with baser materials, untempered with strange mortar, unvitiated by human pretensions of any sort, is the solid resting-place on which a man is to lay his acceptance before God, and that there is no other; that to attempt a composition between grace and works is to spoil both, and is to deal a blow both to the character of God and to the cause of practical holiness.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Norman L. Walker, Thomas Chalmers, pp. 27--3.

<sup>2</sup> PW, VI, 9. Cf. Ibid., pp. 11, 28.

<sup>3</sup> Memoirs, I, 188.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Miss Collier, Memoirs, II, 183.

The conclusion of his farewell discourse in Glasgow bore the same tidings:

Let me entreat as one parting memorial, that you will treasure up the summary of my own deeply felt experience. Martin Luther hath pronounced it to be the article of a standing or a falling Church, even that of justification by faith and the righteousness of Christ, or that the Church will stand which keeps to Christ, and that the Church will fall by which He is forgotten. The same truth would I record in the hearing of you all--not in the shape of a mere catechetical dogma--not as one of the categorical orthodox doctrines--not as an assumption laid upon the consciences of men by the hand of human intolerance. . . . I should like it to drop as balm on every weary and agitated spirit, and to assure him that if in time past he hath laboured to establish a righteousness of his own, and that still his conscience warns him that he is as far both from rest and from spiritual affection as before, then let him wrap himself round in the garment of that ready-made righteousness which Christ hath brought in, and all will be light and love and liberty.<sup>1</sup>

Our justification gives us a legal right to the blessings of God, said Chalmers. It is understood, not in a personal, but in a judicial or forensic sense. The change is not in a man, but in his relation to God.<sup>2</sup> "To justify a man, in the evangelical sense of the term, we cannot possibly make out a plea grounded on the fact of his own personal innocence; but still a plea is found, in virtue of which justice requires that he should be treated as an innocent person."<sup>3</sup> A man's justification is not a matter of pure benevolence; it is based on the righteousness that has been

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<sup>1</sup> PW, VI, 420--1.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 502 ff.

<sup>3</sup> SW, IV, 312. Chalmers' sermon on "Connexion between Faith and Peace," from which this statement is taken, was a good example of his interpretation of "Justification by Faith."

merited by Christ in His atoning death.<sup>1</sup> But it is altogether a matter of grace.<sup>2</sup>

Retain a single shred or fragment of legality with the gospel, and we raise a topic of distrust between man and God. We take away from the power of the gospel to meet and to conciliate. For this purpose, the freer it is, the better it is. That very peculiarity which so many dread as the germ of antinomianism, is, in fact, the germ of a new spirit, and a new inclination against it.<sup>3</sup>

Now if our justification is through faith alone, what is the nature of this faith? And how is it related to different aspects of Christian experience?

In his Institutes Chalmers treated faith as a matter of intellectual assent only. "Faith whether in a proposition or in a person, is the reckoning of him or it to be true, and it is nothing more."<sup>4</sup> He substantiated this view in his notes on Hill's Lectures: "I am not fond of admitting in faith anything more than the intellectual act of believing, or of viewing it in any other light than as a simple credence of the truths of revelation, in as far as these truths are or may be known to us."<sup>5</sup> Faith is a purely intellectual phenomenon; the emotional and volitional elements usually associated with faith are not constituent parts of it, but consequences thereof.<sup>6</sup> But for faith to be real, consent must be joined to assent. "The same

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 313. Cf. SW, VII, 499 ff.

<sup>2</sup> PW, VI, 483.

<sup>3</sup> SW, III, 260--1.

<sup>4</sup> SW, VII, 548.

<sup>5</sup> SW, VIII, 291.

<sup>6</sup> SW, VII, 546, 557.

regeneration which worketh in us an assent to the truth as it is in Jesus, worketh in us a consent to the whole of His discipleship."1 Without consent, there is only a semblance of faith without a reality. Only when faith is operative, producing consent of the volitional and emotional faculties, can it be considered a real faith.2

This limitation of faith to the intellectual faculty was more or less a psychological analysis and may have been--according to the emphasis laid on the initial assent and the final consent--only an attempt to illustrate the position that in the exercise of trust the believer does not act blindly. That Chalmers had any idea of modifying the Reformed doctrine that laid stress on the exercise of the will in the response to the gospel offer seems unlikely. Any suspicion aroused by the narrow limitation of the concept in his lectures is removed by the closely related discussion of the necessary consequents of the primary activity of the understanding in apprehending the truth of, and assenting to, the propositions setting forth the object of faith on which its exercise terminates.

Though in his more technical discussion he tried to restrict faith to a mere intellectual response, Chalmers often could not refrain from applying it in his more practical dis-

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1 Ibid., p. 556.

2 Ibid., pp. 590 ff.

cussions to a committal of the whole person. Preaching on "Faith of the Patriarchs," he condemned those who regarded faith as a matter of adjusting the orthodoxy of their creed or learning their catechism:

Faith is with them a mere embrace, by the understanding, of one or more articles in an approved system of Divinity. . . . The indolence of a mere theoretical contemplation, is thus substituted for the practice and the painstaking and the perseverance of men, in busy pursuit of some object to which they are bending forward, with the desire and the diligence of an earnest prosecution . . . .

Now this is really not the apostolic description of faith. . . . The assent of the understanding to any one of the positions of orthodoxy, is neither the substance of things hoped for, nor is it the evidence of things not seen. . . . This is faith: and you see how immediately, and without the intervention of a single step, practice emerges out of it. . . .

Thus it is, essentially and by its very nature, a practical principle and no sooner does it take possession of the heart of any individual, than it holds out the plain attestation of itself upon his history--and not by his dogmata, but by his doings.<sup>1</sup>

In his private Journal, Chalmers often revealed that he thought of faith in a much broader sense than mere intellectual assent, and in such cases frequently expressed it more as a matter of responding to a Person than accepting a proposition about that Person. As an example, we refer to an outward reflection of the inner self that had just gone through the momentous spiritual change:

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<sup>1</sup> SW, IV, 553--5. Cf. his comments on Hebrews 11 in PW, IV, 354.

I am reading the "Marrow of Modern Divinity," and derive from it much light and satisfaction on the subject of faith. It is a masterly performance, and I feel a greater nearness to God, convincing me that Christ is the way to Him, and an unconditional surrender of ourselves to Christ the first and most essential step of our recovery. O my God, make me every day wiser unto salvation.<sup>1</sup>

The next day he made this entry: "Finished the 'Marrow.' I feel a growing delight in the fulness and sufficiency of Christ. O my God, bring me nearer and nearer to Him."<sup>2</sup>

Faith should be regarded more as a process than an act. Commenting on Ambrose Serle's The Christian Remembrancer, Chalmers wrote:

It is not enough that we have received the gospel, we must stand in it. And it is not enough that we barely believe it, for we are told, on the highest authority, that unless we keep it in memory, we have believed in vain. . . .<sup>3</sup>

It is not enough then, . . . simply to have believed that Christ died for our sins. This fact must ever and anon be recalled to our memory. . . . It must live in our daily recollections.<sup>4</sup>

It is important, said Chalmers, to recognize the distinctions between a general faith and a special or an appropriating faith. Only the latter is efficacious for salvation. A general faith may recognize the honesty and, to a certain extent, the validity of the gospel, but only when a man

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<sup>1</sup> Journal for 23 August 1812, Memoirs, I, 298.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs, I, 298. John MacLeod's reference to Chalmers as advocating a Sandemanian conception of faith is only a partial interpretation and must be set alongside many references in his sermonic and devotional writings. See MacLeod's Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History since the Reformation, pp. 187--8, 220--1.

<sup>3</sup> SW, XII, 280.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

"appropriates" it to himself does it bring the remedy to his diseased soul. Though he could not accept Chalmers' doctrine of a limited atonement, McLeod Campbell approved his strong insistence on the word "offer," and the importance placed on the appropriating act of faith.<sup>1</sup>

Underlying Chalmers' conception of faith, especially in its restriction to the intellectual faculty, was an identification of belief in the Bible with belief in God.<sup>2</sup> With his view of Scripture, it was only natural for him to regard a true faith in God as extending to the whole of God's testimony.<sup>3</sup> A more restricted object of faith is Jesus Christ in His redemptive work, and understood in a more particular way, His life and death as applicable to one's own salvation.<sup>4</sup> Another distinction that he sometimes made was relating "to believe" with acceptance of a proposition and "to trust" with acceptance of a promise.<sup>5</sup>

The assurance of salvation is not to be thought of as a constituent element of faith but as a normal consequence.<sup>6</sup> Chalmers hesitated to say that a genuine faith issues in a complete assurance of our own salvation, but there might be

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<sup>1</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> SW, IV, 322 f.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>4</sup> SW, VII, 580.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 552. It should be noted that in other places Chalmers spoke of trust as something different from faith in its nature as well as in the object on which it is set. VIII, 290.

<sup>6</sup> SW, VII, 563 ff.

a possibility of such a degree of assurance.<sup>1</sup> Faith brings about consent, and both enter into the cause of our assurance, but our sense of possessing a saving faith is conditioned by the obedience that grows out of our faith. "Our own righteousness forms the alone proof to us of our having a personal interest in the righteousness of Christ. . . ." <sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, Chalmers would have us conjoin this "hope of experience" with the "hope of faith," by which our assurance comes through our faith in the truth of the Promiser, who holds forth to all who believe the assurance of salvation.<sup>3</sup>

On the subject of perseverance Chalmers had little to say. His scheme of Christian salvation forced him to the conclusion that "he who hath a real faith in the gospel of Christ will never fall away."<sup>4</sup> But how do we know that we have a "real faith?" ". . . the only way in which you can ever know or have an actual part in this great privilege, is by the sanctity and the virtues of your life."<sup>5</sup> It is to the part man plays in salvation that attention should be directed. Even though God be working in us, we are to work out our own salvation. So he advised his friend:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 600.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VIII, 476. Cf. PW, VI, 77.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VIII, 418. Cf. I, 188; XII, 311; PW, VI, 123--4.

<sup>4</sup> SW, III, 217.

<sup>5</sup> SW, VIII, 459.

I have earnestly to entreat of you that you hold fast all right and serious impressions: and be assured that there would not have been so much said in the Bible about backsliding, . . . had there not been a strong tendency to relapse on our part. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The same conviction he expressed in pleading for his own salvation:

Save me, O God, from the hard and hopeless impenitency into which backsliders so often fall--their latter state being worse than their first.<sup>2</sup>

Chalmers' concern was much stronger for a more practical issue of faith--namely, its relation to repentance. The metaphysical question as to which preceded the other, faith or repentance, was of minor importance to him. "The one implies the other;" he said, "and instead of assigning any precedence in the matter, I would say of the two that they are contemporaneous."<sup>3</sup> The matter of importance was the urgency of this necessary aspect of salvation.<sup>4</sup> Lyell's summary of Chalmers' message on repentance seems to be typical of his emphasis:

You are to repent to-day, not because it may be too late tomorrow, as you may die; but because, though you are to have ever so long a life, your case will be more hopeless should you resist this warning. Your mind will be hardened by the habit of resisting. . . .<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. Robert Edie, 10 August 1815, Memoirs, II. 12.

<sup>2</sup> PW, IV, 92--3. Cf. Ibid., pp. 220--1.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VIII, 490.

<sup>4</sup> SW, XII, 331. Cf. PW, IV, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Lyell, Life, Letters, and Journals of Sir Charles Lyell, Bart., p. 331. This reporter of Chalmers' sermon added: "I think I would sooner hear him again than any preacher I ever heard, Reginald Heber not excepted." Loc. cit.

Since "repentance is not one act of the mind," but "a course of acting by which we die daily unto sin,"<sup>1</sup> our growth in obedience to the law of Christ is a necessary consequence of the initial step in our salvation. An appropriating faith lays hold on the precepts as well as the promises.<sup>2</sup> "Wherever the privileges and blessings of the gospel are truly appropriated by faith, the precepts of the gospel maintain their authority over the conduct of the believer."<sup>3</sup>

This thought points directly to our next section, but one more point should here be made. Chalmers stressed that our total response to the gospel is necessarily a result of regeneration wrought in us by the Spirit of God.<sup>4</sup> We know not how, only that "all which is good and new in the result of this process cometh from above, and that altogether, they make up a whole man. . . ."<sup>5</sup> There is "no partitioning in this matter between nature and grace;"<sup>6</sup> Calvin is right in representing God to be all in all in our rebirth.<sup>7</sup> But we should beware of a certain "useless and inoperative Calvin-

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<sup>1</sup> Journal entry for 30 November 1814, Memoirs I, 364. Cf. SW, IV, 294; XII, 324.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 560.

<sup>3</sup> SW, XII, 472. Cf. PW, VI, 120--1.

<sup>4</sup> SW, VIII, 463. Cf. SW, IV, 30--1; III, 338.

<sup>5</sup> SW, VII, 538. Chalmers' reference to regeneration as "the reconstruction of a mechanism" rather than as "the rebirth of an organism" indicated the influence on his whole thinking of the mechanistic interpretation of the universe. Ibid., p. 546. His concept was more acceptable when he stressed that regeneration is a moral rather than a physical question. VIII, 461--2.

<sup>6</sup> SW, VII, 540.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 544 f.

ism" which tends more to speculate on the nature of the process than to follow its direction and impulse. In following the stimulus of this new birth, continued Chalmers, we should guard against placing the merit of our salvation in an act of faith; rather should it be placed in the object of faith. Likewise, the comfort of our salvation is found, not in looking to ourselves, but to our Savior. The reality of the subjective experience rests upon its "contact" with the objective reality.<sup>1</sup>

### B. A MORAL RIGHTNESS

#### RENOVATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL

It was Chalmers' strong contention that "our great business on earth is to regain the lost image of the Godhead, or, in other words, to perfect our holiness."<sup>2</sup> Looming large in his scheme of Christian salvation was the necessity for a moral rightness in proper relation to a legal right. In the Evangelical-Moderate controversy in the Church of Scotland, the Evangelicals had been accused of excluding the necessity for good works from the gospel message. The Moderates had been accused of emphasizing good works to the extent that they became a ground of our acceptance with God. Chalmers was most anxious to avoid either accusation. To clear the ground for his own treatment, he discounted three views which

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VIII, 3 ff. Cf. PW, VI, 123--4.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 372.

he felt had distorted the proper relation between faith and works, or between law and grace.

The first object of his attack was the Antinomians, whose popularity caused him much concern.<sup>1</sup> In admitting one's justification by faith alone, they feel that one is exempted from duty--that virtue and personal righteousness are somehow superseded and have no place in the economy of the gospel. Confronted with the absurdity of this "spurious and pretended orthodoxy,"<sup>2</sup> Chalmers simply affirmed: "All who refuse a life of virtue, do in fact refuse the heaven of the New Testament, the only heaven of eternity. . . ."3

At the other extreme were the legalists, who would make virtue an instrument of their justification or a ground for meriting a right to the blessings of God. In attacking this view, Chalmers pointed out how its supporters must think that something less than perfect virtue will satisfy God, or, on the other hand, they degrade the character of virtue by making it only the price of heaven. "There is nought of the sacred, or the disinterested, or the godlike, in such an economy; and its religion is one of intense selfishness."<sup>4</sup>

There were certain evangelical writers who made virtue

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1 SW, VIII, 67.

2 SW, III, 382.

3 SW, VIII, 45. Cf. p. 20.

4 Ibid., p. 46.

only a token of heaven, degrading it into merely "the evidence of faith." Chalmers revolted against the way they assigned to virtue or holiness a lower place and character than belong to it. To make holiness only a sign of salvation is to make faith greater than charity--a reversal of the apostolic maxim. And again, said Chalmers, surely the fulfilment is greater than the condition or mean of the fulfilment--that is, holiness a greater thing than faith.<sup>1</sup>

In a letter to a friend, Chalmers suggested the line of his own thought:

I think that holiness is looked upon by some evangelical writers in rather a lame and inadequate point of view. . . . They are right in saying that it gives no title to God's favour, but they are wrong in saying that its chief use is to ascertain that title, or to make that title clear to him who possesses it.

It is, in fact, chiefly valuable on its own account. It forms part, and an effective part, of salvation. It may be considered as an entrance upon heaven. Christ came to give us a justifying righteousness, and He also came to make us holy. . . . Let holiness be prosecuted as that which constitutes the very element of heaven . . . .<sup>2</sup>

Expressing a similar view in the Institutes, he wrote:

Holiness is more than the way to some better and higher landing-place: holiness is itself the landing-place, and our restoration to holiness the great object of the economy under which we sit. Christianity does not begin with virtue and end with justification--it begins with justification and ends with virtue.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 36. Cf. pp. 46--7.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to a friend in 1818, Memoirs, II, 184.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VIII, 47.

Holiness should be thought of as "the superstructure which the divinely appointed mechanism of doctrine and promises is to rear."<sup>1</sup> The manger, the cross, the tomb--all for the purpose of making us holy, even as He is holy! This is, to use one of his favorite phrases, "the terminus ad quem of Christianity."<sup>2</sup> "And let us remember," he prayed, "that the great end and object, the terminus ad quem of the Christian doctrine, is not that I should believe as a Christian, but that I should do as a Christian; the one is the stepping-stone to the other. If justified by faith, I am also judged by works."<sup>3</sup>

Understood in this sense, holiness becomes a part of the very essence of salvation. Such a view, as Denney has rightly observed, rebels against a too exclusively objective view of the work of Christ.<sup>4</sup> Holiness is definitely not the cause of reconciliation with God, but it is definitely a result.<sup>5</sup> "If we find not that renewing process is taking effect upon us, neither ought we to figure that we have any part in the reconciling process."<sup>6</sup>

We are not to mitigate the doctrines of a justifying faith, and an all-perfect righteousness, because of the abuse that has been made of them by hypocrites--but, leaving to these doctrines all their prominence, we are

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, III, 81.

<sup>2</sup> PW, IV, 329. Cf. SW, IV, 251--3; X, 125.

<sup>3</sup> PW, IV, 52. Cf. pp. 236--7, 304, 328--9.

<sup>4</sup> James Denney, The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation, p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> Memoirs, I, 185. Cf. SW, XII, 408--9.

<sup>6</sup> SW, XII, 263.

to place by their side the no less important and undeniable truths, that heaven is the abode of holy creatures, and ere we are qualified for admittance there, we must become holy and heavenly ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

"In the claim for heaven, it [virtue] is of no account; in the indispensable character for heaven, it is all in all."<sup>2</sup> "Virtue is heaven already in possession."<sup>3</sup> "It is heaven within us."<sup>4</sup>

Eternal life, then, is based on two necessities: "forgiveness through faith in the blood of the atoning sacrifice" and "purification and holiness through the operation of the Spirit, which is given to them that believe."<sup>5</sup> This life begins now in so far as we grow in holiness. Heaven should be thought of more as a state than a place, as was clearly brought out in his sermon on "Heaven a Character and not a Locality."<sup>6</sup>

We can never expect to attain perfection on this earth,

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Chalmers, "An Introductory Essay," in William Romaine, The Life, the Walk, and the Triumph of Faith, I, xxi--xxii.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VIII, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> PW, VI, 135.

<sup>6</sup> SW, III, 669 ff. Cf. VIII, 36 ff. Though Chalmers accepted heaven and hell as the respective places of eternal reward and punishment, and believed that the present phase of heaven has a counterpart in the present phase of hell--"A house upon earth, from the mere operation of moral causes, may be turned into hell," (SW, IV, 588; Cf. VIII, 512--4) he seldom referred to hell, from either pulpit or chair. His hesitancy to dwell on this subject was a reflection of the influence of the Marrowmen. James Walker has shown that, in contrast to Rutherford's work on the Covenant where the word "reprobation" was used eighty to ninety times, the work of Boston on the Covenant made use of the word only three times. The Theology and Theologians of Scotland, pp. 91--2.

according to Chalmers.<sup>1</sup> The warfare between the carnal and the spiritual continues as long as we are in this earthly body.<sup>2</sup> His own experience substantiated this view, which he felt to be the teaching of Scripture. A chronicler wrote soon after Chalmers' death:

Of himself he often thought like Paul, as of the chief of sinners. To a friend he said late on parting, "Pray for me! Pray for me! I often feel, with Paul, this body of death! This body of death! I know not what I should have been but for the grace of God that restrained my nature's wildness."<sup>3</sup>

Holiness, then, is something which, though ever growing, is never completed in this world, and in every response to the divine imperatives of obedience, one rests on the grace of God for stimulus to begin and strength to carry on.

By "holiness" Chalmers usually meant an outward expression of an inner faith, or what he often called "good works." He spoke of Christian salvation as "of grace unto works,"<sup>4</sup> "not of or from works," but "to works."<sup>5</sup> Evangelical virtue is exalted over legal virtue because of the higher motives which prompt its performance.<sup>6</sup> In similar fashion obedience to the law has ceased to be a covenant of salvation, as in the Old Testament dispensation, but it is retained for us as a rule of life.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gurney, op. cit., pp. 126--7.

<sup>2</sup> SW, IV, 348--9.

<sup>3</sup> "Thomas Chalmers," Lowe's Edinburgh Magazine, August 1847, p. 328.

<sup>4</sup> PW, IV, 204.

<sup>5</sup> SW, VIII, 81.

<sup>6</sup> SW, XII, 353.

<sup>7</sup> SW, IV, 269, 564--5.

As professor, Chalmers warned his students that in their zeal to proclaim the legal right that is offered in Christ, they might neglect the adjunct demand for a moral rightness.<sup>1</sup> As preacher, he warned his congregation about their failure to produce good works. "Morality preaching should not be "in the gross," he said, but should delve into the practical issues of everyday life.<sup>2</sup> "It is false, that the principle of Christian sanctification possesses no influence over the familiarities of civil and ordinary life."<sup>3</sup> At the same time, to demand holiness through any other means than faith in Jesus Christ is futile preaching. His years at Kilmany had given him experimental evidence of this truth,<sup>4</sup> which he seemed first to have learned from Wilberforce's Practical View.<sup>5</sup> To

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<sup>1</sup> See his five reasons for preaching "good works," SW, VIII, 70 ff.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VIII, 486; PW, VI, 634. See his "Commercial Discourses." In urging this truth on his students, Chalmers was reported to have said: "If you speak plainly you will not fail to rouse some consciences. When I was at Kilmany I preached one day on honesty, and after the sermon some of the people asked me how I had heard of Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s fowls having been stolen on Saturday night. The circumstance was quite unknown to me. I happened to preach on the next Sabbath in a neighbouring parish, and delivered the same sermon. Curiously enough, there had been some plundering of the roosts there also, of which I had heard nothing. But the rustics persisted in speaking of my discourse as 'Mr. Chalmers' hen sermon.' Make hen sermons, gentlemen!" Donald Fraser, Thomas Chalmers, pp. 137--8.

<sup>3</sup> SW, III, 148.

<sup>4</sup> See "An Address to the Inhabitants of the Parish of Kilmany," SW, XII, 489 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. William Wilberforce, A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, contrasted with Real Christianity, pp. 275--6, with Memoirs, I, 183 ff.

emphasize both strains of Christian salvation was the preacher's duty, and a study of Chalmers' sermons indicates that he heeded a proper balance--often in the same sermon--of proclaiming the offer of free salvation and the cost that was involved in receiving it.

A perusal of Chalmers' lectures, along with many of his sermons, would leave one with the impression that his conception of holiness was largely restricted to an outward adherence to the law of God. A closer study of the man, especially as revealed in his devotional writings and samples of his correspondence, indicates a more subjective element in this conception. Holiness becomes a characteristic growing out of a personal relationship with God, rather than an obedience to His law. Out of a subjective experience springs the objective response. The terror of sin is wounding the heart of love, instead of breaking the law of the Almighty. God is regarded more as one to deal with, rather than to talk about--religion as something to speak rather than to speak about. Where the head ruled alone, now the heart shares the reign. Chalmers' conception of Christianity cannot be correctly interpreted until these tendencies that breathe through some of his writings are placed alongside his more systematic utterances.

We begin to catch the heart, as well as the mind of

Chalmers, by reading excerpts from his correspondence. In a letter to Wilberforce he wrote:

We had a visit from Mr. Gray of Sunderland lately, one of the good men of the Church of England. It is truly refreshing to have a visit from such. It always puts me in mind of a saying of Brainerd, that he had heard hundreds speak about religion but not above one or two speak religion. We Scotch speak about it--look at the matter intellectually--come forth with our didactic speculations about the thing; but the evangelical English clergymen, as far as I can observe, possess the thing, and possessing it they have by far the most effective ingredient of good preaching, which is the personal piety.<sup>1</sup>

His advice to Mr. Smith, the first-fruits of his Glasgow ministry, was:

Let all argument, if possible, be banished from our Sabbath converse, and let us know what it is on that day to fill up an hour not with treating religion so much as an intellectual subject, but as an affair of the heart, a matter of feeling and of devotion. . . .<sup>2</sup>

About the time of his own conversion he wrote thus to a friend:

I am very much interested in the progress of your sentiments. This, in the language of good but despised Christians, is called the communication of your religious experience. There is fanaticism annexed to the term; but this is a mere bugbear; and I count it strange that that very evidence which is held in such exclusive respect in every other department of inquiry should be so despised and laughed at when applied to the progress of a human being in that greatest of all transactions, from a state of estrangement to a state of intimacy with God--from the terror of His condemnation to an affecting sense of His favour and friendship and reconciled presence--from the influence of early and debasing affections, to the influence of those new and heavenly principles which the Spirit of God establishes in the heart of every believer.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Wilberforce, March 1822, Memoirs, II, 364.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs, II, 34.

. . . My prayer for us both is, that "it may be made sure," and that "hereby we may know that He dwelleth in us, and we in Him, that He hath given us of His Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

Our study grows in intimacy as the curtain is drawn and we behold this "man of prayer"<sup>2</sup> all alone--reading from The Book and praying to The Father:

I confess, O Lord, my grievous delinquencies from holiness of heart and life. . . .<sup>3</sup>

O my God, teach and enable me to forgive: and let me herein see how indispensable our subjective state is in Christianity, and that however true it is that we are saved by the faith which apprehends aright its objective truths, yet shall we have no part nor lot in its blessings, unless that personally we realize the graces of the Christian character, and in particular forgive one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us.<sup>4</sup>

Felt my union with Christ; and prayed that emptied of self, I might be filled with the fulness and the sufficiency of the Saviour. Prayed . . . for a growing delight in God, for the perfect love which casteth out fear, for a sense of the obligation of His will. . . .<sup>5</sup>

. . . at the conclusion of my prayer, felt a delightful sense of His sufficiency and fulness.<sup>6</sup>

Fasted somewhat this day, and in obedience to Baxter, had a self-examination after dinner. . . . Old things are not wholly passed away: the love of literature for itself, and the love of literary distinction, have not passed away. . . . The impression of my defects is not such as to overwhelm me, but to stimulate. Objective Christianity mixed its influence with the examination. The defects of my subjective should just lead me to cling faster to the objective; and I did feel a peace when I tried myself by the verse, that to them who be-

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to James Anderson, 18 December 1811, Memoirs, I, 248--9.

<sup>2</sup> Description by Gurney, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> PW, V, 23. Cf. IV, 77.

<sup>4</sup> PW, IV, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Journal of 5 November, 1812, Memoirs, I, 304--5.

<sup>6</sup> Journal of 1 January 1813, Ibid., p. 317.

lieve He is precious. I was moved even to tears by a sense of my deficiencies. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Do these examples not point away from any cold formalism of Christian obedience? Is there not a reaction to the "rational supernaturalism" which Pfleiderer ascribed to Scottish religion?<sup>2</sup> Are we not warranted in seeing in such expressions a tension between a system demanding facts and demonstrations and an experience yielding life and inward renovation?

#### RENOVATION OF SOCIETY

The renovation of the individual was the proximus terminus ad quem of Christianity. The renovation of society was the ultimus terminus ad quem. The way to the ultimus was through the proximus, and no other way. The ultimus was the grand object of Chalmers' ministry. His economics, his politics, his ecclesiastics--all were directed toward "the Christian good of the people of Scotland."<sup>3</sup> Buchanan summed it up this way:

To reform society was the object of his life. The gospel could do this, and nothing else could do it. And how to bring the gospel to the homes and the hearts of the neglected masses that were multiplying with such fearful rapidity on the "ground floor" of the social edifice,--this was his grand problem, which he spent his days in working out with incredible energy, and in labouring with matchless eloquence and power to get other men to learn.<sup>4</sup>

The renovation of society begins at the cross, and

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<sup>1</sup> Journal of 1 October 1826, Memoirs, III, 104.

<sup>2</sup> Otto Pfleiderer, The Development of Theology, p. 303.

<sup>3</sup> Memoirs, IV, 394.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Buchanan, The Ten Years' Conflict, I, 181.

is accomplished in proportion to the place that the Cross occupies in the lives of individuals.

Jesus Christ died . . . to bring us unto God. This is a truth, which when all the world shall receive it, all the world will be renovated. . . . It is this doctrine which is the alone instrument of God for the moral transformation of our species.<sup>1</sup>

Moral transformation comes only through the "regenerating power which goes along with the faith of the New Testament."<sup>2</sup> "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."<sup>3</sup> The proclamation of the Word of God, therefore, is the only way to produce a moral renovation of society. Such a change in society will necessarily lead to social and economic reform, so that Christian education is at the very root of all genuine progress that can be hoped for. Only by "the growth and the transmission of personal Christianity throughout the land" can the "torrent of corruption" in the community be effectually combated.<sup>4</sup> Justifying his work in political economy, Chalmers wrote:

We have long had no faith in the efficacy of any scheme for the mitigation of the evils of our social state, but the Christian education of the people; and it is for the purpose of exposing the inefficacy of all other schemes, that we have found it necessary to

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<sup>1</sup> SW, III, 279--80.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 10:17.

<sup>4</sup> SW, III, 214.

attempt such an extensive survey of Political Economy.<sup>1</sup>

The high road, then to a stable sufficiency and comfort among the people, is through the medium of their character, and this effectuated by other lessons altogether than those of a political economy.<sup>2</sup>

An individual Christian is generally in better comfort and condition than other men. A whole parish of Christians would be a parish of well-conditioned people.<sup>3</sup>

This Christian renovation of society did not involve the breaking down of the present structure of society. Diversities of wealth and station would not be equalized.

It is not the abolition of rank, but by assigning to each rank its duties, that peace and friendship and order will at length be firmly established in our world. It is by the force of principles, and not by the force of some political overthrow, that a consummation so delightful is to be attained.<sup>4</sup>

The same view he expressed in a speech at the laying of the cornerstone at New College:

Nothing will ever be taught, I trust, in any of our halls, which shall have the remotest tendency to disturb the existing order of things, or to confound the ranks and distinctions which now obtain in society. But there is one equality between man and man which

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<sup>1</sup> SW, IX, 9, Cf. p. 356. William Law Mathieson recognized this predominating theme in Chalmers' writings on various subjects: "His whole gospel of social welfare was based on the assumption that if a comparatively small number of people could be permeated by the teaching and subjected to the constant visitation of a parish minister, they could not fail to rise in the moral and ultimately in the economic scale; and whether he was arguing against pluralism and a compulsory provision for the poor or in favour of Establishments and Church Extension, this was always the burden of his theme." Church and Reform in Scotland, 1797--1843, p. 301.

<sup>2</sup> SW, IX, 259.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>4</sup> SW, III, 196.

will strenuously be taught--the essential equality of human souls; . . . . Let kings retain their sceptres and nobles their coronets--what we want is a more elevated ground floor for our general population, and this without derangement to the upper stories of the social and political edifice.<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to ascertain to what extent Chalmers expected all men to become Christians and all society to become Christianized. As a whole, his writings breathe a tone of optimism. Such an expression as "when Christianity becomes universal"<sup>2</sup> indicates an undercurrent of expectancy for our race. In his sermon on "Universal Peace" he said that "so soon as Christianity shall gain a full ascendancy in the world, from that moment war is to disappear."<sup>3</sup> Though he expressed a mild preference for the premillennial theory of the Second Advent,<sup>4</sup> his eschatological views seemed not to enter into his scheme of renovating society. He preferred to dwell on the practical--what man can do now to bring in the Kingdom of God!

### III. PREDESTINATION

In our examination of Chalmers' system of Christian theology, we have observed his diagnosis of the disease with

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Watt, A. Mitchell Hunter, W. A. Curtis, New College Edinburgh, A Centenary History, pp. 3--4.

<sup>2</sup> SW, III, 196.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 430.

<sup>4</sup> Chalmers seldom mentioned the subject of eschatology, except for the fact of a heaven and a hell. Intimations of his views came out in his devotional comments on several portions of Scripture and occasionally in his sermons. PW, III, 339; IV, 414--5, 431--4; SW, III, 98, IV, 567; Correspondence, p. 323.

which man is afflicted and then the nature of the remedy which has been provided for his restoration. We come now to the question of the extent of the remedy. If the remedy should be offered to all, as he certainly believed it should, then are there any limitations in regard to its efficacy? Chalmers' answer was presented in his doctrine of predestination, found in the second volume of the Institutes, but in a clearer and briefer form in a pamphlet entitled Five Lectures on Predestination, which he delivered at the University of Edinburgh. In these he acknowledged his debt to Jonathan Edwards for most of his views, recognizing some help from Godwin, Leibniz, and Williams.

Chalmers' approach to the Biblical doctrine of predestination was through his conception of philosophical necessity. In the material world, he said, we all recognize a necessity. Successions are invariable, and our instinctive belief in the constancy or uniformity of nature extends to those processes beyond our cognizance. If we knew all the phenomena and all the rules of the material world, at the present time, we could predict its state at any future period.<sup>1</sup>

Now, are mental phenomena, unlike all others, independent of what preceded them, he asked? Must they be the result of chance? Will we take away the doctrine of necessity in the mind and find ourselves with an incomprehensible enigma--an

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<sup>1</sup> Predestination, p. 3. Cf. SW, VIII, 91 ff.

effect without a cause, or a self-originating series of events? It is on the strength of such considerations that necessity is extended from the physical to the mental and moral world.

If a man deliberates, he is the subject of certain laws of suggestion; if he prefers, it is from the balance of considerations the decision is made; and then the command is given forth to the active instruments of the human will so that all is as dependent on what went before, as are the motions of planets, or of particles.<sup>1</sup>

The question now arises, what about the universal feeling of liberty, this inward sense of free-agency? If it be said we must do a certain thing, our response is that we feel we can do one thing or another as we please. How do necessitarians dispose of this difficulty? First, answered Chalmers, we cannot do everything we please, such as bending our arm back at the elbow. Second, to say that we can do as we please is simply to affirm a sequence in the philosophy of mind. Volition is the antecedent--performance is the consequent.<sup>2</sup>

But what is behind volition? A metaphysical liberty, by which volitions are regarded as having no antecedent, would violate the unanimous and instinctive belief in the

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<sup>1</sup> Predestination, p. 4. Cf. SW, VIII, 96 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Predestination, p. 4. Cf. Edwards' definition: "Liberty . . . is the power, opportunity, or advantage, that any one has to do as he pleases, or conducting in any respect, according to his pleasure; without considering how his pleasure comes to be as it is." "Freedom of the Will," Works, II, 183.

law of causation. Either the cause of the volition is in the will, or out of it. If in the will, or as some express it, "the self-determining power of the will," then each volition depends on a preceding volition, resulting in an endless series of causes. The necessitarian, then, contends that the cause of the initial volition be out of the will. The conclusion is reached, said Chalmers, that "there is nothing in philosophical necessity to interfere with the popular notion of liberty--the power of doing as we please. Like as the act of doing must spring from an act of pleasing; so the act of pleasing must spring from something else."<sup>1</sup>

One further question confronts the necessitarian: how can this voluntary act be moral? Here we must distinguish between a physical and a moral necessity. Physical necessity is action taken against the will, on which fatalism is based; moral necessity is an action performed in the will, or with the will, on which a philosophical necessity is based.<sup>2</sup> Both are actions of necessity, but in the latter case a man acts with the concurrence of his will. When pressed with the question as to how a man can be a necessary and yet a moral agent, Chalmers said we must resort to conscience for a solution. It is a universal fact, he wrote, that "the sense of these moral distinctions arises immediately on the view of the

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<sup>1</sup> Predestination, p. 5. Cf. SW, VIII, 102 ff.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VIII, 113.

object--affected only by the nature of that object, with regard being had to its cause."<sup>1</sup> In addition, virtue and vice are ascribed not to the cause of an action or a volition, but to its nature.<sup>0</sup> Otherwise, "we get involved in a train, which is either quite interminable, or which leads to the conclusion, either that virtue does not exist at all, or that it is something essentially belonging to the action itself and not to the cause."<sup>2</sup>

Having set up his system of philosophical necessity, Chalmers was prepared to deal with the scriptural doctrine of predestination. He made no real distinction between predestination, foreknowledge, foreordination, or election; he lumped together a number of passages dealing with each of these and brought forth the general doctrine that all the universe's "fact and fortitudes, at any moment, were determined by Him, who endowed it at first with all its properties."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> Predestination, p. 7: Cf. SW, VIII, 109 ff. Cf. Edwards' statement: ". . . if there be any such thing as a virtuous or vicious disposition, or volition of mind, the virtuousness or viciousness of them consists, not in the origin or cause of these things, but in the nature of them." Quoted in SW, VIII, 114, from "Freedom of the Will," op. cit. p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> Predestination, p. 12. Cf. SW, VIII, 151 ff. Chalmers recognized that the rigidity of his doctrine would naturally lead to a double predestination. He found scriptural support for his view, but preferred to state it in a very mild way, and not so dogmatically as is done by such a present-day Calvinist as Loraine Boettner. Cf. SW, VIII, 162 ff. With Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, pp. 113 ff.

The argument involves the sovereignty of God over His creatures. There is an interminable series of progressions, reaching from eternity that is past to the eternity that is to come. We occupy a place in this great chain of sequences. . . . And He doth thus "foreknow" just because "He did predestinate;" because His sovereignty is more absolute than that of the artificer over the machine he has formed. . . .1

Now this is Predestination; and it matters not whether it is carried into effect on the universe, by His willing it at every instant, or from the constitution He originally gave.2

Such "a rigid and absolute predestination" Chalmers felt to be consistent with the teaching of Scripture, as well as with his philosophical presuppositions. He thought his doctrine of predestination to be in line with that of Calvin, but actually he advanced on Calvin in following so closely the argument of Edwards. Man's will is determined by his understanding and character, and ultimately by God. God's will is equally fixed and determined by His character of ineffable goodness. Thus with Chalmers and Edwards, determinism is complete. God's will is fixed in the same sense as ours.3 For Calvin, all things depend on God's "good pleasure." Beyond that he did not go. In comparison with Calvin, Edwards depended more on the observations of his psychological study, greatly influenced by Locke, and tried to fit the Biblical account of predestination into these psychological presuppositions.4

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1 Predestination, p. 11.

2 Ibid., p. 12.

3 Ibid., pp. 6, 18. Cf. Edwards, op. cit., pp. 83 ff.

4 John Calvin (Henry Beveridge, translator), Institutes of the Christian Religion, II, 214--5. This comparison of Calvin's doctrine with that of Edwards was presented in John Henderson Powell, "Determinism in Calvin," pp. 231 ff.

Thus, it was not unexpected that Chalmers, following so closely the argument of Edwards, should deviate from his maxim, "Direct to Scripture," in his treatment of predestination.

Chalmers recognized the difficulties that were involved in his view of predestination and was anxious to deal with common objections to the doctrine. One popular accusation directed at this view was that it discouraged moral effort at goodness. Chalmers did not think so.

But where is the discouragement to the use of means, in the doctrine that affirms the certainty of the consequent? There is nothing that could so paralyze exertion as the doctrine of contingency. . . . Metaphysical liberty would stamp insanity on such a process; to which the doctrine of necessity alone restores consistency.

The doctrine does not prevent moral influence; but gives efficacy to it.<sup>1</sup>

As there is dependence between antecedents and consequents in the vegetable world, so also in the moral. To the man who claims that it discourages the training of children Chalmers would point to the dependency between cause and effect, and say: "The Necessitarian, of all men, ought to be the most zealous of educationists."<sup>2</sup> Instead of operating as a sedative, it operates as a stimulus.<sup>3</sup> If anyone disagrees with this conclusion, said Chalmers, especially anyone of the Church of England, then let him apply the experi-

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<sup>1</sup> Predestination, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VIII, 127.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

mental test--what has been the effect of Calvinist theology (including predestination) on the character and life of the people of Scotland?<sup>1</sup>

An almost insurmountable difficulty that Chalmers faced was that of reconciling his whole argument with the moral character of God. When confronted with such a problem, he had to admit that no one could resolve it completely. Recognizing that we pass beyond the veil into the region of the unknowable when we try to connect the subject with the plans and purposes of God, he preferred simply to accept the statements of Scripture and stop where they stop.<sup>2</sup> The origin of evil is one of those things beyond the limit of our cognition.<sup>3</sup> But certain speculations might be useful in vindicating God from the charge of being the author of sin. One device is to observe the privative character of evil, and to go so far, if necessary, as to regard evil as a negation.<sup>4</sup> A preferable device is the conception of the "vis inertiae of matter." In the creation of matter its vis inertiae was essential to the very being and constitution of such a substance, thus forming a necessary condition of its existence, not as an active, but as a passive property:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 147. Cf. SW, III, 512.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VIII, 155, 165.

<sup>3</sup> Predestination, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> SW, VIII, 165--6.

The end of God in creation was not that evil should exist, but the greatest possible good. This was the direct object; the evil is the incidental accompaniment--not in being because desired of God, but owing to the essential defectibility of the creatures, or to what Leibnitz and others have termed its defective receptivity. . . . He formed it because it was good, and though it was evil.<sup>1</sup>

Chalmers saw some value in the use given to this theory of Leibniz and Williams.<sup>2</sup> He was even willing to ascribe probability to the validity of this speculation, but preferred to speak of it merely as a neutralizer of the objections of the questioner.

Chalmers was fond of the saying that he was "much more anxious to prove the innocence of this doctrine [predestination], than to prove its truth."<sup>3</sup> Though he regarded it as definitely scriptural, as the most reasonable interpretation of God's sovereignty in the world, and as the view most productive of righteousness among men, his practical and evangelical vein led him to say:

We do not care so much for your being strict and sturdy necessitarians, as for your being sound and scriptural and withal practical divines. . . .<sup>4</sup>

I would rather that men should treat all the doctrines of Predestination as vagaries than not attend to these practical overtures [of the gospel].<sup>5</sup>

In order that the doctrine might be a stepping-stone

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 171 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Predestination, p. 13. Cf. SW, VIII, 188.

<sup>4</sup> SW, VIII, 88.

<sup>5</sup> Predestination, p. 14.

rather than a stumbling-block, Chalmers offered several suggestions in regard to its treatment. The first one grew out of Bishop Butler's statement that "what should concern us most in every theological question, is the part which man has in it, and not the part which God has in it."<sup>1</sup> Between the "decree" and the "destiny" there are many "links in the chain." "It is with these sequences, and with that part, that brief intermediate part, of the vast progression along which he is at present moving, that he has proximately and personally to do."<sup>2</sup> We are to remember that at the beginning it was not an individual event, but a process, that was ordained.<sup>3</sup>

The Predestination of the New Testament, fixes all the intermediate steps, as well as the final and glorious consummation. "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." Hence the doctrine which is thought by many to supersede holiness, gives the strongest urgency on its side; showing that conformity to the Saviour is a necessary part of the chain. . . . The doctrine of Predestination should never be allowed to deafen, on the sinner's ear, the call of the gospel salvation.<sup>4</sup>

In the second place, he felt that predestination might put a drag on the universality of the gospel offer. So aware of this danger was he that he concluded the section of his Institutes on predestination with a chapter on "The Universality of the Gospel." Elsewhere, he expressed a dis-

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VIII, 175.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 449.

<sup>4</sup> Predestination, p. 17. This theme was the basis of his sermon, "On the Doctrine of Predestination." SW, IV, 591 ff. Cf. PW, IV, 187--8; Correspondence, pp. 15--6.

taste for the usual statement of the doctrine of particular redemption, especially when it was related to any "arithmetical view" of the atonement.<sup>1</sup> Woe unto ministers who propound such doctrine--"manacled and wire-bound in the fetters of their wretched orthodoxy!"<sup>2</sup> No doctrine of limited atonement or divine predestination should mitigate our zeal in offering the gospel to every man and urging his acceptance on the ground of his duty. "These overtures [of the gospel] are not made to him as one of the children of election; they are made to him as one of the children of humanity."<sup>3</sup>

The third point that Chalmers made in regard to the treatment of this doctrine was that predestination should be regarded not as milk, but as meat--not for "babes in Christ," but for mature Christians. While it gives nourishment to some, it gives indigestion to others.<sup>4</sup> The time for the application of this doctrine is not at the commencement, but at the conclusion of a Christian course. The decree behind him and the destiny before him are not man's chief concern; he has chiefly to do with the work and warfare of the present day, and in this connection should the doctrine have its main application.<sup>5</sup> As predestination is not avoided altogether in Scripture, so should it not be in the pulpit.

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VIII, 424 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 427.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>4</sup> Memoirs, II, 529.

<sup>5</sup> SW, VIII, 150. Cf. Predestination, p. 22.

It may be profitable to the Christian by awakening the deepest concern about eternity, by deepening the humility of the creature, by giving him a profounder sense of dependence on God, and by ministering a hope to the advanced believer through the medium of his acquired virtues.<sup>1</sup> But the preacher should remember this, said Chalmers:

It is not from the wretched policy of concealment, but from the wise policy of adapting the means to the end, that we should not like you, from the pulpit, to dogmatize on the process, when you would be better employed in urging your hearers to become the subjects of that process.<sup>2</sup>

#### IV. GOD

Having devoted 127 pages of his Institutes to the moral and spiritual disease of mankind, 242 pages to the nature of the remedy provided for in the gospel, 103 pages to the extent of this remedy, Chalmers concluded his systematic treatment of Christian theology with six "Supplementary Lectures," totaling seventy-five pages. Two of these dealt with the different methods of presenting theology; four dealt with the general doctrine of God--"On the Trinity," "On the Moral Uses of the Doctrine that Christ is God," "On the Doctrine of the Divine and Human Nature in Christ," "On the Doctrine of the Spirit." "Supplementary" was an appropriate description, for they served only to clarify certain

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<sup>1</sup> Predestination, p. 22. Cf. SW, VIII, 130.

<sup>2</sup> Predestination, p. 21.

points previously considered and to assist in the practical exposition of the doctrines. Nowhere did Chalmers leave a systematic presentation of "theology proper." For his doctrine of God, we must bring together for examination various references in his sermons and his lectures on the different phases of Christian salvation.

The conclusion of such a study suggests a reason for the absence of what is found in the writings of most theologians. Chalmers' conception of God was not substantially different from the general trend of Scottish theology with its Calvinistic basis. Why should he repeat what had been said over and over again? What he did intend to do was to emphasize certain aspects of the generally accepted doctrine that had been neglected or to elucidate certain relations that he felt had been obscured by scholastic formulations or improper extremism. Here we record the more prominent of these emphases, especially those that seem to have flavored his whole scheme of theology.

#### CHARACTER OF GOD

Chalmers' sermon on "The Goodness and Severity of God"<sup>1</sup> was an excellent example of what he regarded as foremost in a proper understanding of the Biblical revelation of the character of God. There is no place for an abstract conception

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<sup>1</sup> SW, IV, 215 ff.

of God. It is only in His relation to men that we are concerned, and with Him in His redemptive work are we principally concerned. It is not to the scholastic representations, but to the scriptural that we are to look. "A God of naked intelligence and power is not the God of Christianity. . . ."1

A "balanced" view of God's character was the constant plea made by Chalmers. There are some who reduce all God's attributes to the single quality of goodness. Often did he revolt against this "poetical" or "sentimental theism," in virtue of which, "a transient but treacherous and hollow regard towards the Divinity, may be detected in the hearts of those who nauseate the whole spirit of the gospel. They admit into their contemplation only as much of the character of God as may serve to make out a tender or an engaged exhibition of Him."2 Such a partial view he felt to be at the root of the Socinian system, causing laxity in theology as well as in moral philosophy, and resulting in a slight view of our disease and the remedy needed for its treatment.3

There are others, said Chalmers, who look primarily at God's severity. They array him as such, "by the news which they have given forth of such a dread and despotic

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1 SW, XII, 61. God's work in creation Chalmers simply took for granted, though, as we have observed in the chapter on "Natural Theology," he attempted to reconcile the Genesis account with the revolutionary discoveries by geologists of his period. See PW, I, 1 ff.

2 SW, IV, 404. Cf. IV, 216; V, 312; XII, 191.

3 SW, VIII, 365, 372.

sovereignty, as to impress the conception of a fatalism that is inexcusable, a hopeless necessity against which all prayer and all performance of man are unavailing."<sup>1</sup> These theologians introduce the doctrine of predestination "unseasonably," and neglect the gracious invitations of the gospel message.<sup>2</sup>

The true view of the Godhead includes both a goodness and a severity. The former complements the latter as one oar complements the other in rowing a boat. In the gospel of Jesus Christ, we see them united; apart from this, their relation is an enigma to us.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, there is a severity:

There is a law that will not be trampled on. There is a Lawgiver that will not be insulted. . . . In the economy of that moral government under which we sit, there is no compromise with sin. . . . There is no toleration with God for the impure or the unholy; and it were a violence to His nature did iniquity pass without a punishment or without an expiation.<sup>4</sup>

Chalmers' frequent reference to God as "Lawgiver" emphasized the holiness of God, whose demand for righteousness is absolute.<sup>5</sup> "Perfect holiness is perfect virtue, but in a peculiar aspect, that of separation and recoil from its opposite."<sup>6</sup> The severity of God might be thought of as a result of His justice or His truth or His majesty, but

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<sup>1</sup> SW, IV, 217.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>5</sup> See sermon on "God Is Love," SW, IV, 438 ff.

<sup>6</sup> SW, VII, 30.

primarily it results from His holiness. The vindicative phase of God's will is caused by the righteousness of His character, and the stability of a righteous government demands it.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, there is the goodness of God. The main idea here centers on the intent and the extent of divine condescension expressed in the life and death of the Son of God. In his famous Astronomical Discourses this thesis was defended from the attacks of infidelity.<sup>2</sup> But it is mercy in full and visible conjunction with righteousness:

It is the grand peculiarity of the gospel scheme, that while by it God hath come forth in love and tenderness to our world, He hath at the same time made full reservation of His dignity. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Men are asked to respond to the goodness of God, not a general outpouring of goodness, but a specific expression of this goodness conjoined with His righteousness--that is, in the cross of Christ.<sup>4</sup> If they refuse to respond positively, there only remains for them the severity of God. It was in one of his favorite sermons, "Fury not in God," that Chalmers brought out so clearly the preeminence of God's gracious invitation, that He does not want to glorify Himself by the death of sinners; but if rejected, God's fury is "automatically" released.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SW, IV, 223--5.

<sup>2</sup> See sermon on "On the Extent of the Divine Condescension," SW, III, 43 ff.

<sup>3</sup> SW, IV, 226.

<sup>4</sup> See sermon on "The Evils of False Security," SW, IV, 201 ff.

<sup>5</sup> SW, IV, 411 ff. Cf. sermon on "Danger of Neglecting the Gospel," pp. 239 ff.

PROVIDENCE AND PRAYER

Closely related to Chalmers' doctrine of predestination was his doctrine of providence--both based on the sovereignty of God. His control is absolute over both man and the world.

It forms a noble demonstration of His wisdom, that He gives unremitting operation to those laws which uphold the stability of this great universe; but it would go to heighten that wisdom inconceivably, if, while equal to the magnificent task of maintaining the order and harmony of the spheres, it was lavishing its inexhaustible resources on the beauties, and varieties, and arrangements, of every one scene, however humble, or every one field, however narrow, of the creation He had formed.<sup>1</sup>

As all is suspended upon God, and as He reigns with as supreme a dominion in the heart of man as in the world around us, there is no doubt that every affection of this heart--the remorse which embitters it, the terror which appals it, the faith which restores it, the love which inflames it-- . . . that all is the work of God . . . . Though it be God alone that worketh, yet He worketh by instruments; and that, without any wish to question or to impair His sovereignty.<sup>2</sup>

Every breath I inhale, is drawn by an energy which God deals out to me.<sup>3</sup>

Chalmers' view of a closed universe sometimes made his doctrine of providence an almost impersonal affair. He was not unaware of the difficulty that arose in harmonizing such a system with the efficacy of prayer. He was confident of the efficacy of prayer, even understood in the sense of "a thing of asking on the one side and of receiving upon the

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<sup>1</sup> SW, III, 456. Cf. PW, VI, 62, 69.

<sup>2</sup> SW, III, 355. Cf. pp. 427 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

other, . . . as an engine by which to shift or to modify the succession of events, . . . a real interchange between earth and heaven. . . ."1 In such a way as this he would harmonize his belief in the efficacy of prayer with the constancy of nature:

. . . it does not appear why an answer to prayer might not be given; and yet all the established sequences of our world be maintained in their wonted order, as far back as philosophy can discover them. Instead of God dispensing with the secondary causes, when He meets and satisfies our prayers, they may be the very instruments by which He fulfils them. . . . Between the widest confines of all which nature can see upon the one hand, and that throne whence the Author of Nature issues forth His mandates upon the other--there is a hidden intermediate process, which connects the purposes of the Divine mind, with the visible phenomena of that universe which He has created. . . . It is thus, that at one and the same time, we may be under the care of a presiding God, and among the regularities of a harmonious universe.<sup>2</sup>

In a similar way prayer is related to work, which God may use as a means to the answer of our prayer. Addressing Dr. Duff on his departure to the mission field, Chalmers said that the missionary had both things necessary for success: wisdom to work and piety to pray--combining man's part with God's part in the missionary enterprise.<sup>3</sup> During the cholera epidemic in 1832, he stressed both the healing virtue of medicine and the healing virtue of prayer for averting the disease.<sup>4</sup> Frequently did he stress to his stu-

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1 SW, V, 438.

2 SW, XII, 486--7. Cf. Gurney, op. cit., p. 23.

3 PW, VI, 441 ff. Cf. SW, III, 355 ff.; IV, 499--500.

4 Memoirs, III, 315--6.

dents and friends the necessity of combining prayer with labor:

I believe that the want of success on the part of clergymen is mainly reducible into the neglect of prayer, see Acts vi. 4, and there observe the co-ordinate importance given by the Apostles to prayer and the ministry of the word.<sup>1</sup>

Let us minister as much as if the whole success depended on ourselves; let us pray as much as if the whole success depended upon God.<sup>2</sup>

### DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

Concerning the doctrine of the Trinity, Chalmers believed that "all which is plain in this doctrine is of vital importance, and that all which is of vital importance is plain."<sup>3</sup> One needs to distinguish between what is scripturally plain and what is scholastically obscure. The individual propositions of the Father being God, of Christ being God, of the Holy Spirit being God, are abundantly plain. And so is the fourth proposition, that God is one. The common sense of people can lay hold of each of these statements. The whole mystery is raised by our attempting their reconciliation. As Scripture does not itself offer, neither does it ask us, to reconcile them.<sup>4</sup> They present no mathematical falsity, even though it is beyond the province of our reason to comprehend

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. Morgan, 14 August 1829, Memoirs, II, 531. Cf. SW, IV, 47 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Mr. Morgan, 16 October 1833, Memoirs, II, 532. See Chalmers' Address at Commencement and Conclusion of First General Assembly of Free Church of Scotland, pp. 18--9.

<sup>3</sup> SW, VIII, 193.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

their relationship.<sup>1</sup>

In designating it "the ne plus ultra of our deliverances on the subject of the Trinity," Chalmers expressed the preferable way of treating the difficulty:

I should feel inclined to describe it by negatives rather than by affirmatives, denying Sabellianism on the one hand on the scriptural evidence of the distinction between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; denying Tritheism on the other, on the scriptural evidence of there being only one God, professing the utmost value for the separate propositions, and on their being formed into a compendious proposition, confessing my utter ignorance of the ligament which binds together into one consistent and harmonious whole.<sup>2</sup>

It was important for him that the doctrine of the Trinity be treated with discretion, and John Cairns has expressed strong approval of Chalmers' caution against a too scholastic and materialized conception of the Trinity.<sup>3</sup>

#### DOCTRINE OF JESUS CHRIST

In the chapter on "The Holy Scriptures," we observed the extent to which Chalmers went in establishing "the divine origin of Christianity" on the ground of the miraculous works of Jesus Christ and His followers. When he came to consider the doctrine of the person of Christ, he offered no elaborate apology for the deity claimed on His behalf. He simply took for granted the deity of Christ, basing his convictions on both direct and indirect affirmations of Scripture, on the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 189 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 353.

<sup>3</sup> John Cairns, Thomas Chalmers, p. 23.

evidence relative to the "Angel of the Covenant," and on the attitude toward Himself which Christ accepted from His followers.<sup>1</sup> Attention should be given, said Chalmers, not so much to the truth of the doctrine as to its uses. In such an intensive and extensive manner, this doctrine arms the overtures of the gospel with challenging power, enhances every moral lesson gathered from the atonement, and strengthens and impregnates the whole of practical Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

Chalmers recognized in the incarnation a fulfillment of one of the great longings with which natural theology left us. The sense of mystery about God is cleared up to a great extent.<sup>3</sup> The Unseen is seen. The Spiritual becomes sensible. The character of God is revealed to man and the relation between heaven and earth is indicated. "Altogether, the effect of the representation is to soften or do away the terror and the mystery of Heaven's throne."<sup>4</sup> But the revealing phase of the incarnation is only subsidiary to the reconciling purpose, in Chalmers' estimation.<sup>5</sup> "The general purpose of Christ's coming into the world" was for "a ministry of reconciliation."<sup>6</sup> In whatever aspect of the doctrine of Jesus Christ he was dealing, the soteriological emphasis

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<sup>1</sup> SW, VIII, 201 ff., 336--7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 214 ff., 318; Correspondence, p. 305.

<sup>3</sup> SW, IV, 441--2.

<sup>4</sup> SW, VIII, 222.

<sup>5</sup> See sermon on "The Necessity of a Mediator between God and Man," SW, IV, 86 ff.

<sup>6</sup> PW, VI, 164. Cf. I, 178.

was always given. All articles of Christian truth point to this one. Even in his sermon on "The Second Coming of Christ," almost exclusive attention was given to the reconciling work of the First Advent, and its application to us in this present era of grace. That Christ is coming again, we may be certain; but the important matter for us, said Chalmers, is that He has come and has brought us a salvation which is now ours, only for our receiving and our exercising.<sup>1</sup>

#### DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In introducing a lecture on this subject, Chalmers recognized the twofold way in which the doctrine could be regarded. One belonged to the physique of the question, including the personality and divinity of the Holy Spirit, and His relation to the other persons of the Godhead. The importance of this aspect he recognized, but of far greater importance was the morale of the question--the moral relation to which the Holy Spirit stands to us, and the proper response that is due to Him. To the latter aspect Chalmers directed his discussion on this doctrine, both in classroom and in pulpit.<sup>2</sup>

In the chapter on "The Holy Scriptures," it was noted that Chalmers' fundamental premise was that the Spirit acts

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<sup>1</sup> SW, IV, 567 ff.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VIII, 227 ff.

exclusively by and through the Word. "We are not to expect the revelation of any new truth: it is all contained within the four corners of the Bible."<sup>1</sup> The Holy Spirit gives to us "an increased power of discernment,"<sup>2</sup> which may be compared with a telescope, bringing to our vision objects that were there all the time, though invisible to the unaided eye.<sup>3</sup> He acts upon the mind mediately, and not immediately. "He acts by the Word, and in His whole operation on the heart and understanding of men there may be no contravention to the laws of our known philosophy."<sup>4</sup> The Spirit is known to us as the agent both "of light to the understanding" and "of moral impression upon the heart."<sup>5</sup> He is both "the revealer of truth to the mind" and "the bestower of the disposition and the power of obedience."<sup>6</sup>

It is most important, said Chalmers, that we do not neglect our obligations to the Spirit which are noted in Scripture--chiefly, not to resist Him, but to obey Him. Continual resistance leads to the unpardonable sin, which is not a past act, but a present condition. It is a state that has become so hardened by refusals to the calls of the gospel

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<sup>1</sup> Gurney, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> SW, VII, 209.

<sup>3</sup> SW, IV, 9.

<sup>4</sup> SW, VIII, 227. Cf. sermon on "The Necessity of the Spirit to Give Effect to the Preaching of the Gospel," IV, 1 ff.

<sup>5</sup> SW, VIII, 229.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 231. Cf. Gurney, op. cit., p. 96.

that God's Spirit no longer strives with a man, and even though the blood of Christ cleanses the believer of sin, "the sin against the Holy Ghost" remains unforgiven because the man wills not, repents not, believes not.<sup>1</sup>

Recognizing the disease with which he is afflicted, a man seeks a remedy, and when one is proposed, he examines its nature and the extent of its application. The one who gives the remedy is not wholly unrelated to the remedy, but it may be that it is not until after the remedy is given and received that we discover many things concerning the benefactor.

To say that Chalmers would leave us in the dark concerning The Doctor until after the gospel remedy for our disease is received is not the whole truth. The Doctor and His remedy are so interrelated that a study of the latter implies a study of the former. Informal associations are frequent throughout the process, but the very formal introduction to Him remains to the last.

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<sup>1</sup> SW, IV, 606; VIII, 234; IX, 176.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

#### I. APPRECIATION OF THE MAN

If canonization were the practice of the Scottish Church, "Saint Thomas" would certainly rank near the head of the order of saints. Few churchmen of Scotland--or of any other country--can claim the plenitude of tributes that have been offered to Thomas Chalmers. "A veritable spate of funeral orations" was the striking sequel to his death,<sup>1</sup> and such expressions as "the chief Scotsman of his time,"<sup>2</sup> "the greatest representative and noblest specimen of living large-hearted, catholic-minded Christianity,"<sup>3</sup> "the greatest teacher of Theology our country has ever seen,"<sup>4</sup> "the greatest Scotchman of the century,"<sup>5</sup> "one of nature's notables,"<sup>6</sup> "our greatest man since Knox,"<sup>7</sup> "this greatest of modern Scottish churchmen,"<sup>8</sup> are indicative of

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<sup>1</sup> More than thirty such eulogies are now extant.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Carlyle's tribute in a letter to Dr. Hanna, recorded in Norman L. Walker, Chapters from the History of the Free Church of Scotland, p. 20. Cf. James Anthony Froude, Thomas Carlyle, I, 408; and Froude, editor, Reminiscences by Thomas Carlyle, I, 157--60.

<sup>3</sup> James Buchanan, A Tribute to the Memory of Dr. Chalmers . . ., p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Hanna's tribute in Memoirs, IV, 420.

<sup>5</sup> Norman L. Walker, Thomas Chalmers: Life and Lessons, p. vi.

<sup>6</sup> William Gladstone's tribute in Adam Philip, Thomas Chalmers, Apostle of Union, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> James Denney's estimate, Loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Hugh Watt, Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption, p. vii.

the pedestal on which Chalmers has been placed, not only by his contemporaries, but also by historians and theologians of recent times. Among the more intimate words of praise was the reference in a letter from Alexander Whyte, at that time Principal of New College, to his son:

I am reading, I suppose for the dozenth time, Hanna's Chalmers. He was the first Principal of the New College. Oh! What a falling off is here. Be sure you read Chalmers carefully.<sup>1</sup>

## II. REPUTATION AS A PREACHER

Fame first came to Chalmers as a preacher, and time has not altered his rank among the princes of the pulpit. The stupendous response given by the public on both sides of the Tweed brought him many laudatory descriptions, of which these are typical: "as a preacher, the foremost of his age, . . . no living rival,"<sup>2</sup> "the greatest preacher which Scotland has produced,"<sup>3</sup> possibly "the greatest pulpit orator of modern times."<sup>4</sup> Anthologies of great sermons or sermons of great preachers almost without exception include one of Chalmers' sermons, usually "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." That the reputation of this

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<sup>1</sup> G. F. Barbour, The Life of Alexander Whyte, D.D., p. 496.

<sup>2</sup> Dugald S. Williamson, The Homage of the Wise Men to Christ, A Sermon preached after the death of the Rev. Thomas Chalmers, D.D., on the 6th of June, 1847, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> James McCosh, The Scottish Philosophy, p. 397.

<sup>4</sup> Donald MacMillan, Representative Men of the Scottish Church, p. 146.

master preacher of over a century ago has not been forgotten is indicated by the description given him by a contemporary professor of homiletics--"the ablest preacher that the Presbyterian Church has produced."<sup>1</sup>

When such superlatives are so profusely attached to the name of a man, an appraisal of his real significance is likely to be blurred by the network of veneration of the man himself. This is especially true of Thomas Chalmers. No one would dispute the claim that he was more than "an ordinary man," "an average preacher," or even "a typical theologian." But we must guard ourselves against the bias that might roll us too swiftly into the stream of flattery.

### III. SOME OF HIS LIMITATIONS

It is quite obvious that there were certain limitations in Chalmers' theology. A thorough criticism of his thought would involve an analysis of the whole system of the Calvinist tradition. This is not expedient for our purpose. Therefore, we only mention several limitations that were most prominent in, and characteristic of, "Chalmers the theologian."

Chalmers is an excellent example of quality's being the victim of quantity. Few men have ever spread their interests and activities so broadly. How many have written in so numerous and varied fields: natural science, political economy, sociology, ethics, psychology, philosophy, education,

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<sup>1</sup> Personal letter from Andrew W. Blackwood, Princeton Theological Seminary, U. S. A., 15 January 1949.

church administration, church and state--not to mention his many sermons and theological works dealing with natural theology, apologetics, and Christian dogmatics? How many have received such high regard as ecclesiastic, social worker, administrator, educator, author, preacher, and professor? An inevitable result of attempting to be an expert in so many fields was a certain narrowness in each. He usually chose several authorities in the field, or as in the case of his practical work, several conclusions derived from his own experimental schemes, and based all his elaborate and expansive discussions on them. The wide scope of his intellectual effort, coupled with a soaring imagination and a bulky style, contributed to a noticeable lack of technical exactness in thought and expression.

The second limitation grew out of the tendency of his personality to be more receptive than creative or critical. Though he was ahead of his time in some practical lines, intellectually he was almost entirely regulated by contemporary thought. He did not question the generally accepted mechanical view of the universe. He failed to recognize the growth of doctrinal ideas along the line of historical perspective. An understanding of intellectual progress was hindered by his over-simplified conception of the acquisition of knowledge. The implications of Scripture criticism

were beyond his grasp.<sup>1</sup> And as Campbell Fraser has pointed out,<sup>2</sup> by ascribing finality to the contemporary findings of science, his own conceptions of the relation between science and religion were clearly dated. Even in Christian theology Chalmers accepted the substance of what had been handed down from the past, and exercised his critical faculty primarily in matters of form and presentation.

#### IV. HIS SIGNIFICANCE TO SCOTTISH THEOLOGY

The exposition of Chalmers' theology in the foregoing chapters has not brought to light any new doctrine or any significant contribution to theological thought. We have noted unique distinctions, unusual adjustments, and fresh emphases, but his theological thought substantially followed the ebb and flow of the general tradition of Scottish Calvinism. Admired as a theologian during his lifetime, his reputation has long since outlived his writings. The remarkable response accorded his earlier authorship far surpassed the use of his later writings, especially those published posthumously. Their substance deviated little from what others had written, and their massiveness, both in style and size, was certainly a hindrance to popular ac-

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<sup>1</sup> A discussion of this weakness was included in Isaac Taylor's review of Dr. Chalmers' Works and Posthumous Works in The North British Review, November 1856, pp. 1 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Campbell Fraser, Philosophy of Theism, pp. 127--9.

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An examination of a number of works in philosophy, natural theology, and Christian dogmatics, published in the last hundred years, reveals the very limited place given to the theological thought of Chalmers. To a large extent William Cunningham based his Lectures on Chalmers' Evidences, but he left his predecessor almost unmentioned in his Historical Theology. Campbell Fraser's references to Chalmers' thought were usually in a critical vein, though he did praise his having "diffused a fresh glow of intellectual light and spiritual life through the frozen orthodoxy of Scotland."<sup>2</sup> Occasional references to particular phases of Chalmers' thought were made by such writers as McLeod Campbell,<sup>3</sup> John Stuart Mill,<sup>4</sup> Alexander Bruce,<sup>5</sup> and James Denney.<sup>6</sup> Reflecting something of the Scotsman's impact on the New World, James McCosh,<sup>7</sup> along with Charles Hodge<sup>8</sup> and Henry

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<sup>1</sup> See David Masson, Memoirs of Two Cities: Edinburgh and Aberdeen, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Campbell Fraser, Biographia Philosophica, p. 63. Cf. The Philosophy of Theism, pp. 127--9.

<sup>3</sup> John McLeod Campbell, The Nature of the Atonement, pp. 61 ff.

<sup>4</sup> John Stuart Mill, A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive, II, 42.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Balmain Bruce, The Providential Order of the World, p. 123.

<sup>6</sup> James Denney, The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation, p. 297.

<sup>7</sup> James McCosh, The Method of the Divine Government, Physical and Moral, pp. 220--2.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 694--5.

Smith,<sup>1</sup> found some of Chalmers' distinctions helpful, especially in the field of natural theology. But taken as a whole, there is little evidence of anything that can be designated as distinctively Chalmerian in origin that has really influenced theological thought of the past century.

Nevertheless, this is not to deny Chalmers a definite significance in the history of Scottish theology. Though his theological writings seem to have had little impact on theological thought since the passing of his own students, Chalmers made a real contribution to the theological atmosphere of his own day, and by his example and through his own students, has no doubt affected the religious life of Scotland during the past century. His significance may be summed up under three services that he rendered to the theology of his land, each of which is illustrated by the testimonies of different writers.

#### A CONNECTING LINK

The first service was to act as a connecting link between extremes in theological thinking. He was a "mediating theologian,"<sup>2</sup> and his might be called a "Reaction Theology"—reacting against several extremes. The Evangelical-Moderate

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<sup>1</sup> Henry B. Smith, System of Christian Theology, pp. 496, 512, 575.

<sup>2</sup> The use of this term has no reference to a contemporary school of theology.

controversy in the Scotland of Chalmers' day was primarily ecclesiastical, but each party was noted for certain emphases in theology. It was considered a Moderate characteristic to stress literary and scientific interests, while there was an Evangelical disdain at such "secular" pursuits. It was generally regarded that "the good life" was stressed from the pulpit of the Moderate, "salvation by faith" from that of the Evangelical. Chalmers attempted to keep a foot in both camps. As Denney has pointed out, Chalmers fortunately recognized the danger of dwelling too much on the distinction between justification and sanctification and stressed that the great matter is their connection.<sup>1</sup> MacMillan has suggested that the secret of Chalmers' success was due to the balanced combination of extremes of Moderatism and Evangelicalism,<sup>2</sup> and while his reference was primarily to things ecclesiastical, the suggestion was equally applicable to things theological. This was implied in James Stalker's statement that it was fortunate for Evangelicalism in Scotland that it was mediated through "the big brain and big heart of Chalmers," which prevented the "petty aspect" that developed in England.<sup>3</sup> In pointing to Chalmers' new treatment of old Evangelical doctrines, Masson concluded that "the Evangelicalism

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<sup>1</sup> Denney, op. cit., p. 297.

<sup>2</sup> MacMillan, op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>3</sup> James Stalker, "Evangelicalism," The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, V, 605.

of Chalmers formed a stage in the religious history of Scotland."<sup>1</sup>

Chalmers was also a connecting link between the extreme objectivism of the eighteenth century and the subjectivism of the nineteenth. These two trends were exhibited in the two main arguments in his natural theology--design and conscience, and in his combination of the historical and the experimental evidences for the truth of Christianity. In this connection it is significant how Chalmers reflected the changing theological environment in gradually shifting the emphasis, in both examples noted above, from the objective to the subjective.

The third set of extremes for which Chalmers served as a connecting link was an extreme predestination and a free and full gospel offer to every person. In accepting the Edwardian development of Calvinism,<sup>2</sup> Chalmers held to one extreme. On the other extreme was his repeated emphasis on the universality of the gospel offer. Though intellectually he could not unite them in complete harmony, he believed both to be true and thus held them separately.

In acting as a connecting link between these several extremes, Chalmers made himself difficult to pigeonhole. He was of no one school or party. Every descriptive noun re-

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<sup>1</sup> Masson, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Supra, p. 242.

ferring to him really needs a qualifying adjective. His position also made him a target of criticism from different sides. For example, some accused him of preaching a form of legalism;<sup>1</sup> others thought that his Evangelical fervor was so extreme that they expressed the opinion--"Chalmers is mad."<sup>2</sup> Though he was generally regarded as an ardent Evangelical, one publication referred to his being tainted with Moderatism throughout life,<sup>3</sup> and one author accused him of never having become an Evangelical at heart.<sup>4</sup>

#### AN ENLARGED VIEW

Chalmers' significance was also marked by his enlarged view of the practical significance of Christian truth. He recognized the necessity of relating Christian theology to

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<sup>1</sup> See comments on Chalmers' Address to the Inhabitants of the Parish of Kilmany in John Walker, The Faith and Hope of the Gospel Vindicated, pp. 9, 12, 21, 22; and William Braidwood, Faith and Works Contrasted and Reconciled. . . ., pp. 3, 6, 7, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Philip, op. cit., pp. 133--4. "On their way to church one day in Glasgow, a gentleman and his wife met a friend who asked where they were going. 'To hear Dr. Chalmers,' they said. 'What,' he replied, 'to hear that madman!' They invited him to accompany them, promising that if he went and continued of the same opinion, they would never dispute the matter with him again. He accordingly agreed. Chalmers' text that day happened to be I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. The somewhat reluctant hearer became a changed man from that day."

<sup>3</sup> "Dr. Chalmers," The Original Secession Magazine, July 1847, p. 193.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew J. Campbell, Two Centuries of the Church of Scotland, 1707--1929, p. 175.

other fields of thought. Instead of separation or conflict, there should be the closest harmony between the different branches of knowledge, with their connections clearly indicated.

His effort at reconciling the findings of theology and the findings of science was a pioneering service, for at least it made "Scottish orthodoxy" less timid in its approach to science.<sup>1</sup> According to McCrie, Chalmers was the first Scotsman to read the Genesis narrative in the light of geological discoveries,<sup>2</sup> and Donald MacLeod felt that the *Astronomical Discourses* "marked an era in the history of the pulpit."<sup>3</sup>

In his survey of Scottish philosophy James McCosh made the claim that the reconciliation between the Scottish philosophy and Scottish theology was effected by Thomas Chalmers,<sup>4</sup> supporting a claim that had been made a few months after Chalmers' death by an Edinburgh periodical.<sup>5</sup> Neither writer attempted to demonstrate the claim nor to explain exactly what was implied. Though Chalmers did

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<sup>1</sup> Supra, p. 89. Cf. Masson, op. cit., p. 70. Professor Cairns also spoke of this contribution of Chalmers. Jean L. Watson, The Life of Thomas Chalmers, pp. 76--7.

<sup>2</sup> C. G. McCrie, The Confessions of the Church of Scotland, p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> Donald MacLeod, "Thomas Chalmers," Scottish Divines, 1505--1872, p. 290.

<sup>4</sup> James McCosh, The Scottish Philosophy, p. 393.

<sup>5</sup> "Thomas Chalmers," Lowe's Edinburgh Magazine, August 1847, p. 323.

relate several phases of theological and philosophical thought that had previously been separated, the blanket assertion as to his reconciling philosophy and theology seems to be too strong. Perhaps his most significant linkage was between ethics and Christian doctrine. One writer has shown that it had been the custom of Scottish philosophers to keep these two at arm's length, while in Chalmers' case they were developed together.<sup>1</sup>

Chalmers also recognized the need for an enlarged view when relating Christian truth to everyday life. This recognition was the impelling force behind his experiments and his writings on such subjects as "Pauperism" and the "Establishment Principle." According to one historian, he was the first churchman to see the significance of the Industrial Revolution on the church's life,<sup>2</sup> and the Commercial Discourses certainly exemplified his keenness to see a broader application of Christian teaching than had previously been expected. Blaikie recognized Chalmers to be the first to apprehend the capabilities and obligations of the pulpit--

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Laurie, Scottish Philosophy and Its National Development, p. 248. The same view was expressed by the reviewer of Memoirs of John Urcuhart in The Christian Instructor, October 1834, pp. 688--90.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew J. Campbell, op. cit., p. 178.

to educate character, to establish right relations with nature and humanity, to improve all that was improveable in man, to saturate the social and national life of the country with the spirit of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

"The king of practical theologians" was Peter Bayne's description of Chalmers, observing that "he wrote with the sound of the world in his ears; every one of his books seems anchored to earth."<sup>2</sup> This testimony has been supported by many other writers who have recognized Chalmers' contribution to an enlarged view of the practical significance of Christian truth.<sup>3</sup>

#### A FRESH VITALITY

"Moonlight preaching ripens no harvest."<sup>4</sup> There is no use in planting unless a harvest is gathered, and no crop produces a harvest without light and life from the sun. This deep conviction stimulated this man of God to instill a fresh vitality into the Christian theology and the presentation of the Christian message in Scotland and even beyond the seas.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Garden Blaikie, The Preachers of Scotland, p. 8. Cf. the advice given his students to follow Chalmers' pulpit example of giving Christian truth a broader application. For the Work of the Ministry, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Bayne, Six Christian Biographies, p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> See Norman L. Walker, Thomas Chalmers: His Life and Lessons, pp. 91, 123; James Buchanan, A Tribute to the Memory of Dr. Chalmers. . ., pp. 17--8; Review of Sermons Preached in the Tron Church, Glasgow, in The Eclectic Review, December 1819, p. 504.

<sup>4</sup> Chalmers' words in Philip, op. cit., p. 118.

<sup>5</sup> Supra, pp. 23--4.

Chalmers was "one of the great minds that gather up the results of a past development and reproduce it with a new stamp and impress."<sup>1</sup> His approach to theology was fresh, and his presentation vital. Though his creed was essentially the same as that of his Calvinistic forebears, it was flavored, in the words of McCosh, "with a more humane and benignant aspect, and with a more thorough conformity to the principles of man's nature."<sup>2</sup> Blaikie summed it up this way:

Thoroughly Calvinistic in his theology, he was yet full of humanity, and breathed only love and kindness to his race; and the bones of Calvinism were so covered with flesh and skin and life-like colour, that, in his hands, it became a thing of beauty and joy forever.<sup>3</sup>

"No preacher ever went so into one's heart," said Carlyle.<sup>4</sup>

By approaching theology from the bottom of the heart as well as from the top of the head, Chalmers made himself liable to several notable comparisons. Stalker likened him to Schleiermacher, stating that the Scotsman "did for theology, in his academical prelection, exactly what Schleiermacher was doing for it at the same time in Germany. . . ."<sup>5</sup> Thomas Smith in the preface to one of Vinet's books wrote: "Chalmers has been termed the Scottish Pascal, Vinet has been termed the Swiss Chalmers. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cairns' estimate in Watson, op. cit., pp. 76--7.

<sup>2</sup> James McCosh, The Scottish Philosophy, p. 401.

<sup>3</sup> Blaikie, The Preachers of Scotland, p. 288.

<sup>4</sup> Froude, editor, Reminiscences by Thomas Carlyle, I, 160.

<sup>5</sup> Stalker, op. cit., p. 605.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Vinet (Thomas Smith, translator), Studies in Pascal, p. iv.

Whatever may be said of Chalmers as a preacher or a lecturer, it cannot be that he was dull. With an eloquence with which "he buried his adversaries under the fragments of burning mountains,"<sup>1</sup> he disturbed many minds and hearts whose theology had been stagnant and whose faith had been dormant. As a powerful catalytic agent Chalmers gave an amazing impetus to his listeners, and it was through the vitality that was imparted to his students that Chalmers made a most significant contribution to the Scottish Church. His chief biographer felt this strongly when he exclaimed:

Others have amassed larger stores of learning, and conveyed them to their students in more comprehensive and compendious forms. But who ever lit up the evidences and truths of Christianity with a light so attractive; and who ever filled the youthful breasts of those who were afterwards to occupy the pulpits of the land, with the fire of so generous and so devoted an enthusiasm!<sup>2</sup>

The comments of Norman Macleod's biographer-brother were similar:

Dr. Chalmers was then professor, and Norman listened with delight and wonder to lectures, which were delivered with thrilling, almost terrible earnestness. The Professor's noble enthusiasm kindled a responsive glow in the young hearts which gathered to listen to him, and the kindly interest he took in their personal welfare inspired them with affection as well as admiration.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond the borders of Scotland this refreshing stream

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey's description in Henry Cockburn, Memorials of His Time, p. 419.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs, IV, 420. Cf. Bayne, op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Macleod, Memoir of Norman Macleod, I, 31--2.

of life was bound to flow. It would be difficult to estimate Chalmers' influence in the world-wide missionary program of the Scottish Church during the last century, but a few months after his death Alexander Duff acclaimed him "the leading missionary spirit of Christendom."<sup>1</sup> This first missionary from Scotland to a foreign land had previously conveyed to Chalmers his personal feelings:

I cannot express the gratification, the comfort, the invigoration of spirit which I have experienced in the very prospect of your giving me a parting address on Thursday, for to you I feel more indebted, as an instrument in the hands of God, for the impulse that carried me to heathen lands, than any other in the form of mere men.<sup>2</sup>

Permeating every fiber of this fresh vitality was a genuine spirit of catholicity. The man whom many remember only as the leader of the Disruption was truly an "Apostle of Union." He "who was 'sent from above' to revive, to restore, and to re-establish the Christianity of Scotland"<sup>3</sup> looked not to the advancement of any one denomination or any one school of theology, but to the high and holy endeavor of advancing "the objects of the Church Universal."<sup>4</sup> His prayers throbbed with the spirit of unity:

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<sup>1</sup> George Smith, The Life of Alexander Duff, p. 281. Chalmers had been notably recognized for his missionary spirit by churchmen in America. A certificate in New College Library, Edinburgh, indicates that the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America had made him an "Honorary Director for Life."

<sup>2</sup> George Smith, op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> NBR, p. 331.

Let not my soul enter into the secret of those who, in the spirit of illiberal sectarianism, would reject the approximations which are now making to a greater unity both of sentiment and of outward profession than has obtained in Christendom since the days of the Reformation.<sup>1</sup>

Before his own Free Church Assembly he spoke:

I trust you will not charge me with over-liberality if I say, as I do from my conscience, that among the great majority of evangelical dissenters in this country, I am not aware of any topics of difference which I do not regard as so many men of straw, and I shall be exceedingly delighted if these gentlemen get the heads of the various denominations to meet together, and consent to make a bonfire of them.<sup>2</sup>

To the Presbyterian family celebrating in Edinburgh the Bicentenary of the Westminster Assembly he had this message: "Co-operation now, and this with the view, as soon as may be, to incorporation afterwards."<sup>3</sup> Pleading for a united effort in world evangelism, his keynote to the newly-formed Evangelical Alliance was: "A oneness in conduct will often lead to an essential oneness of creed."<sup>4</sup> This same spirit that breathed from pulpit, chair, and pen brought to a close his Institutes of Theology with a poem which was often on his lips:

I'm apt to think the man  
That could surround the sum of things, and spy  
The heart of God and secrets of His empire,  
Would speak but love--with him the bright result  
Would change the hue of intermediate scenes,  
And make one thing of all theology.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PW, IV, 396; Cf. p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs, IV, 384.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Chalmers, Christian Union, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Memoirs, IV, 389.

<sup>5</sup> Poem by John Gambold quoted in SW, VIII, 258; Memoirs, IV, 385.

It was such a spirit that led Morell, after mourning Chalmers' death and the loss by the Church at it, to conclude:

May there be many to catch the mantle of the ascending prophet--the mantle not only of his massive intellect, but of his broad, his earnest, and his catholic spirit!!

### EPILOGUE

The theology of Thomas Chalmers may be compared with a mighty, rushing river, whose source is a small but ever-flowing spring high up on the mountain-side. Down the slope trickles the water, picking up force with every fall. Into the valley the stream flows, small in size but great in power. There it bursts into a number of larger streams meandering here and there through the valley. Gradually they unite to form larger and still larger streams. Soon they find their direction from the clear, fresh water from the mountain-side, whose strength pushes them all toward the mouth of the valley and whose purity settles sediment to the bottom. Out into the plain flows the river on a rampage, subduing all enemies and overcoming all obstacles. Down, down the river drops, enlarging its breadth with every fall. Here and there it overflows its banks, and drawing

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<sup>1</sup> J. D. Morell, An Historical and Critical View of the Speculative Philosophy of Europe in the Nineteenth Century (1848 edition), p. 742.

nearer the sea, more and more of its life-giving waters go out to refresh the dry and thirsty land. For the spring on the mountain was not emptying itself to add water to the bulk of the sea, but to bring forth fruit in the plain below.

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