

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Name of Candidate Robert Edward Seymour, Jr.
Degree PhD Date May 14, 1954
Title of Thesis JOHN GILL, BAPTIST THEOLOGIAN (1697-1771)

John Gill was a Calvinistic Baptist who preached to a London congregation at Horsly-down and Carterlane from 1720 to 1771. He exerted enormous influence over a certain segment of his denomination which became captive to his hyper-Calvinist theology. Despite his lack of a formal education, he established himself as a leader among Particular Baptists by publishing scores of pamphlets, books, and sermons which were accepted as oracular by many of his colleagues but which contributed little or nothing toward overcoming the religious apathy of the age.

Gill's first ventures in theological writing were polemical. He considered his Calvinistic system to be the only true faith, and he defended it with fervor and dogmatism. At one point or another, he touched upon nearly all of the major theological issues of his day: the Trinitarian Controversy, the Deistic threat, and the dialectical tension between Calvinism, Antinomianism, and Arminianism. His most ambitious polemic was against the Arminianism of Daniel Whitby and John Wesley against whom he argued the doctrines of (1) eternal election and reprobation, (2) the limited atonement, (3) irresistible grace, and (4) the perseverance of the saints.

The work which made Gill most famous was his nine-volume commentary on the entire Bible. These tomes are virtually valueless today except as an illustration of Gill's approach to Scripture. Ostensibly, he was a Biblical theologian, but actually, he forced Scripture to conform to his pre-conceived doctrines. He was skilful in giving obscure meanings to straightforward verses in order to make them fit into his system.

At the close of his life, Gill compiled a three-volume Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity. Throughout his ministry, his theological point of view remained essentially the same, but the long years of doctrinal controversies and extensive Biblical exposition now made him more articulate in expressing his complete creed. Gill considered theology a science on a par with any other area of study, and he believed that the doctrines of the Christian Faith could be proved. The weight of his proof, however, rested upon his basic premise that the Bible is a divinely revealed Book which should be accepted in its entirety without criticism or question.

Gill was a Covenant Theologian. His thought varied little from that of the Dutch theologian, Witsius, whose ideas were impressed upon Gill as a young man through the influence of Joseph Hussey and John Skepp. Like these men, Gill described the relationship between God and man in terms of covenants, the Covenant of the Law which God entered into with Adam in time, and the Covenant of Grace which He made with Christ before the beginning of the world in order to secure the salvation of His elect. The whole

(over)

Use other side if necessary.

system was evolved in an attempt to uphold God's sovereignty and to reconcile this major premise with man's assurance of salvation. God's eternal decrees destined every man to either salvation or reprobation, and man's highest virtue consisted in willingly submitting to his destiny for the glory of God. Gill's theology posed the insoluble dilemma of having the elect redeemed from eternity and yet condemned within time, and his emphasis upon justification before faith and eternal perseverance left him open to the charge of Antinomianism. His doctrine of the limited Redemption was simply a rationalization of the observed fact that all men are not saved.

Another doctrine which Gill never ceased defending was his belief in baptism by adult immersion. His conviction on this matter was his primary grievance against the Established Church. Gill was an uncompromising Dissenter. His objections to the Church of England were many; he believed that the only true relationship between Church and State was complete separation and that the only true form of the visible church was in autonomous congregational churches.

Gill distinguished himself more for the quantity of his writing than for the quality of it. He was not a trustworthy scholar, and his thought was often superficial and frequently colored by an uncontrollable temper. His hyper-Calvinist theology had a withering effect upon his denomination. He paralyzed the growth of Particular Baptists by his teaching that ministers have no prerogative to offer Christ and His salvation to sinners lest they interfere with the work of God who will save whom He will. The infection of Gill's theology was stubborn in its resistance to the religious awakening initiated by the Methodists, but eventually, his extreme point of view began to be tempered. Gill's star never rose very high on the theological horizon, and in the morning of the new day, he was lost in the light.

JOHN GILL, BAPTIST THEOLOGIAN
(1697-1771)

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of Divinity
University of Edinburgh

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Robert Edward Seymour

May, 1954



"While true religion and sound learning have
a single friend remaining in the British
Empire, the works and name of Gill will be
precious and revered."

A.M. Toplady

July 29, 1772

PREFACE

It is surprising that so little is known among Baptists about John Gill. This is surprising not because Gill was an exceptional person but because he was one of the few leaders of the Baptist denomination who has been concerned with theology. Baptists have never produced an outstanding theologian; nor have they ever had a uniform theological point of view. John Gill attempted to fill this vacuum by being the first Baptist to work out a complete outline of systematic theology. Many Baptists may resent Gill's being called a Baptist Theologian because of their distaste for his theological ideas. Nevertheless, both words in the thesis title were deliberately chosen and each must be emphasized, for Gill thought of himself as a Baptist by conviction and a theologian by vocation.

The purpose of this thesis is to introduce John Gill's thought to those for whom he has been merely a name or a passing reference. It would be presumptuous to call this a complete study, for there is such a vast amount of material from Gill's pen that other students may desire to consider certain facets of his thought in further detail. The

thesis will also attempt to evaluate Gill's theology and to gage the extent to which his influence was responsible for a decline among Particular Baptists. It should be confessed that the writer of this thesis is himself a Baptist.

I am indebted to the following persons for their help in giving me access to necessary books and documents: to Mr. Cyril Wilmshurst of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, for the use of the Church Record Book kept by Gill's congregation; to Miss Joyce Booth of Regent Park College, Oxford, for the privilege of perusing the Kiffin Manuscript; and to Miss Erna Leslie and Mr. J.A. Lamb for their assistance in the New College Library. I am especially indebted to my advisors, Professor J.H. Burleigh, Professor T.F. Torrance, and Professor Hugh Watt, for their valuable suggestions and guidance.

The spelling and punctuation throughout this work, with the exception of direct quotations which are true to the source, follow standard American usage.

R.E.S.

15 May, 1954

Edinburgh, Scotland

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
PREFACE	iii
I. BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHY	1
<u>The Toleration and Decline of Dissenters.</u>	1
Attitude toward Dissenters	1
Consequences of Religious Freedom	7
Moral and Religious Outlook	11
<u>Origin of the Particular Baptists</u>	16
The First Church	17
Confessions of Faith	21
Organizational Structure	24
Theological Trends	25
<u>Early Life of John Gill</u>	27
Parentage	27
Education	29
Profession of Faith	31
Ministry at Higham-Ferrers	34
II. FIRST YEARS IN LONDON	37
<u>The Call to Horsly-down</u>	37
Division of the Church	38
The Ordination Service	42
Quarrel with Thomas Crosby	43
<u>Establishing a Reputation</u>	45
Initial Publications	45
The Great Eastcheap Lectureship	50
<u>Formulating a Theology</u>	51
Indebtedness to Joseph Hussey	51
The Influence of John Skepp	54
Ideas from the Continent	57
A Biblical Basis	58
A Preliminary Statement	63
A Polemical Approach	66

Chapter	Page
III. CONVICTION AND CONTROVERSY	70
<u>Denial of Antinomianism</u>	70
The Lime-street Lecture Incident	72
Warnings to Students in Divinity	79
Exoneration of Doctor Crisp	80
<u>Treatise on the Trinity</u>	82
The Salter's Hall Conference	83
The Orthodox Position	84
Concerning the Sonship of Christ	86
A Confessional Statement	89
<u>The Supralapsarian Scheme</u>	90
Appraisal of the Doctrine	91
A Combination Plan	94
<u>Reply to the Reasonable Religionists</u> ..	95
The Birmingham Dialogue Writer	96
The Nature and Fitness of Things	102
IV. ANSWER TO ARMINIANISM	108
<u>The Cause of God and Truth</u>	110
Concerning Election and Reprobation	112
Concerning the Extent of Christ's Redemption	119
Concerning the Efficacy of Grace in Conversion	124
Concerning the Freedom of the Will	128
Concerning the Eternal Perseverance of the Saints	135
<u>John Gill Versus John Wesley</u>	143
Serious Thoughts Upon Perseverance	143
Predestination Calmly Considered	147
Retorts in Poetry	150

Chapter	Page
V. A SYSTEM OF THEOLOGY, PART I	154
<u>Man's Knowledge of God</u>	156
Natural Theology	156
Supernatural Theology	157
The Attributes of God	159
<u>The Internal Acts of God</u>	163
Eternal Election and Reprobation	163
Adoption and Justification	166
The Covenant of Grace	168
<u>The Fallen Condition of Man</u>	172
The Fall of Adam	172
Original Sin	174
The Servitude of the Will	177
<u>The Administration of the Covenant of Grace</u> ..	179
The Singularity of the Covenant	179
The Two Dispensations	180
VI. A SYSTEM OF THEOLOGY, PART II	183
<u>The Manifestation of the Covenant in Christ</u> ..	183
The Perfect Standard of Righteousness	184
The Need for a Mediator	185
Christ the Prophet	187
Christ the Priest	188
Christ the King	194
<u>The Blessings of the Covenant</u>	196
The Limited Redemption	196
Effectual Calling and Regeneration	204
The Illumination of Faith	207
Sanctification and Perseverance	211
Christian Liberty	215
<u>The Final State of Man</u>	217
Death and Resurrection	217
The Second Coming of Christ	219
The Last Judgment	221
Heaven and Hell	222

Chapter	Page
VII. A DISSENTER'S DEFENSE	225
<u>The Nature of the Church</u>	226
The Invisible Church	226
The Church Visible	227
An Organized Society	232
A Disciplined Fellowship	235
A Worshipping Community	237
<u>Battle over Baptism</u>	239
Background of the Controversy	239
Statement of the Baptist Position	242
The Argument from Propriety and Practicality	248
The Argument from Scripture	250
The Argument from Tradition	254
The Argument from Theology	257
<u>The Church Ordinances</u>	260
The Lord's Supper	260
The Ministry of the Word	263
The Singing of Hymns	266
Prayer	268
<u>Church and State</u>	271
Baptists and Anabaptists	271
The Principle of Separation	273
Civil Obedience	275
Religious Freedom	277
VIII. EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION	279
<u>The Man</u>	279
<u>The Scholar</u>	285
<u>The Preacher</u>	295
<u>The Pastor</u>	301
<u>The Influence</u>	307

Chapter	Page
APPENDIX A: THE REVISED AND FINAL FORM OF THE <u>DECLARATION OF FAITH AND PRACTICE</u> ..	315
APPENDIX B: POEM TO GILL FROM JOHN WESLEY	319
APPENDIX C: A POEM IN REPLY TO WESLEY	327
APPENDIX D: CITATION OF HONORARY DEGREE	331
SOURCES CONSULTED	333

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHY

I. THE TOLERATION AND DECLINE OF DISSENTERS

Attitude toward Dissenters. The Glorious Revolution which brought William and Mary to the English throne in 1688 brought with it freedom from suffering for Protestant Dissenters. From that time onwards through the eighteenth century, John Locke's argument that toleration was not merely politically expedient but positively just and right gradually became accepted. More than a hundred years passed, however, before this argument was made sufficiently strong to erase from the statute books all discriminatory measures aimed at those who were without the Established Church. The Corporation Act, which excluded Dissenters from membership in the municipal bodies which ruled the towns and controlled the election of parliamentary representatives, was not abolished until 1769; and the Test Act, which disqualified for civil and military office all those who refused to take an oath of allegiance or to receive the Sacrament from the Church of England, was not repealed until 1828. Even the Conventicle Act and the Acts of Uniformity were not legally rescinded until long after the advent of

William, but these laws were in effect circumvented by the Toleration Act in 1689. If Protestant Dissenters proved their loyalty to the state by an oath of allegiance or a declaration, this act granted to them liberty of worship, but to Protestant Dissenters only. Roman Catholics, Unitarians, and Jews were still regarded as dangerous. The status of Protestant Dissenters was thus still far from satisfactory, but remembering all too vividly the bigotry and oppression of previous reigns, they praised God for their conditional freedom and celebrated the accession of their new sovereign with one accord. A group of Independent, Presbyterian, and Baptist ministers of the London area formally addressed the new King saying, "As the sun, ascending the horizon, dispels without noise the darkness of the night; so your serene presence has, without tumults and disorders, chased away the darkness that invaded us."¹

This sentiment was a slight exaggeration. Although King William had assured his subjects that he came purposefully for the "preservation of the Protestant Religion,"² he did not succeed in securing for them a full measure of freedom; and even that freedom which Parliament gave was given begrudgingly. His resolution to preserve the Protestant faith, however, was permanently achieved when just before his death,

¹Joseph Ivimey, A History of the English Baptists (London, 1830), Vol. III, p. 20.

²William of Orange, The Declaration of His Highness William Henry (The Hague, 1688), British Museum.

in 1702, the Act of Settlement was passed which guaranteed the Crown to the Protestant line of the House of Hanover.

When Queen Anne came to the throne, the hopes of the Dissenters were still high, and for the first few years of her reign were fully justified. Then things changed. The malice, envy, and hatred which had been generating within the High Church Tory Party, began to gain momentum until finally intolerance burst forth again with renewed power, capturing even the Queen herself. New measures were then enacted to create further difficulties for the Dissenters. An attempt was made to revive a forgotten act passed by Charles II which required every schoolmaster to conform. In 1710 the "Occasional Bill" ruled that every Dissenter who had secured a government office by practicing occasional conformity had to surrender his position. The most serious threat was embodied in the 1714 Schism Bill which stated that no person in England could keep any public or private school or seminary, or teach or instruct youth as a tutor or schoolmaster, who had not first subscribed the declaration to conform to the Church of England and obtained a license from the respecting diocesan. If this law had gone into effect, Dissenters would have had virtually no opportunity to propagate their faith through the education of their children, but due to the death of the Queen, this law was never executed, and in 1719 it was formally repealed. "The death of Queen Anne, and the suc-

cession of the illustrious House of Hanover taking place, occasioned a very great, but a happy change in the affairs of this kingdom," writes Crosby, "and gave new life to the Protestant interest throughout Europe."³

It is conceivable, however, that had the Old Pretender been an Anglican Protestant he might have become King instead of George I, for when Anne died there was much Tory agitation raised in favor of him, but sentiment against Roman Catholicism proved much too strong for those who might have promoted a rebellion in his behalf. At the time of George's accession there was tension in the air, and unfortunate rioting took place in various parts of the kingdom. Those who were friendly to the exiled dynasty incited violence against a number of Dissenting meeting-houses by sounding the old ecclesiastical alarm that "the church was in danger." Although the Dissenters insisted that they had always been ready to take sides with the Church of England in defense of the Protestant religion, they, nonetheless, suffered attacks by those who tended to regard any minority as suspect. When this crisis had calmed, at least the King was impressed by the loyalty of the Dissenters, for he presented to their ministers in the London area a gift of five hundred pounds from his personal purse.⁴

³Thomas Crosby, The History of the English Baptists (London, 1740), Vol. IV, p. 106.

⁴Ivimey, p. 174.

The period from 1720 to 1740 was remarkably free from violence. Religious issues began to be eclipsed by expanding business interests, and intolerance was definitely on the wane. In 1732 the Dissenters appointed a Body of Deputies to defend their civil rights. This was an attempt to register their resentment against those within the State Church who increased their wealth by appointments to public offices while excluding Dissenters from similar opportunities for prosperity. It was hoped that the pressure exerted by this body might effect the needed repeals. The feeling about the failure of the Deputies to obtain the repeal of the Test Act in 1738 is captured in the following comment:

The enemies of the Dissenters chose rather to let the disgraceful and impious enactment remain upon the statute books, that any person who should accept any civil or military office, should also be compelled to insult the Majesty of heaven and earth by eating bread and drinking wine, not in remembrance of HIM by whom it was appointed merely for spiritual purposes, but in compliance with an Act of Parliament, which had been found convenient for the purpose of exclusively increasing the wealth and power of that religious sect which was chartered and endowed by the state.⁵

The City of London made use of the Corporation Act to raise money for the rebuilding of the Mansion House. Since it was known that Dissenters could not qualify by taking the Sacrament to serve as Sheriff, a law was passed imposing a fine upon all who refused to accept their nomination, and Dissenters were purposefully nom-

⁵Ibid., p. 207.

inated from year to year and compelled to pay.⁶

Dissenters were once again put to the test in 1745 when Charles Edward, the Stuart Pretender, invaded the land with an armed following and marched toward London intending to take the throne from George II. The Body of Deputies was speedily called together and recommended not only that Dissenters enlist but also that their meeting-houses be used for training youth to protect their King. Sermons became military rallying cries: "May success attend our prayers and our swords!"⁷ Ironically enough, it was later necessary to pass an Act of Indemnity to excuse those Dissenters who participated from the consequences they should have incurred for having taken part in the conflict without first having received the Sacrament in the Church of England! Though the Test Act was not then repealed, this demonstrative loyalty of the Dissenters was not soon forgotten. Speaking for the abrogation of the act in 1790, a member of Parliament said:

In the year 1715, when the flames of rebellion broke out in the North, ... the Dissenters gallantly assembled, declared their willingness to risk their lives and fortunes in the defense of government ... and during similar insurrections and invasions in 1745, contributed to the maintenance of the Constitution and to the firmest settlement of the Bruns-

⁶J. M. Cramp, Baptist History (London, 1871), p. 430.

⁷Joseph Stennett, Rabshakeh's Retreat (London, 1745), p. 42.

wick family upon the throne of Great Britain.⁸

It was a long time before these "champions of British liberty" entered into their inheritance, but as the eighteenth century closed, their day was at hand.

Consequences of Religious Freedom. It has been the case often in Christian history that the faith flourishes during the dark nights of persecution but withers and dies when brought out into the light of a new day. Such was the case in the eighteenth century. When William inaugurated the new attitude toward Dissenters in the Toleration Act, the way seemed paved for progress for all of the Protestant Dissenting groups. There was great anticipation of increases in number, but instead of their abounding in the work of the faith, their numbers declined. As early as 1714, the Baptist Association at Trowbridge circulated a letter saying:

None of the churches are without sorrow and mourning, on account of the great decay of the life and power of religion amongst professors, and of a carnal worldly spirit taking place, which may justly humble us all before the Lord, for our loss of first love; and fill our minds with a jealous fear, lest the holy and jealous God should for these things manifest his wrath and full displeasure against his churches, by suffering our enemies to break down the fences of our religious and civil liberties and to remove his candlestick out of their places, and suffer the enemies of the Lord Jesus to prevail.⁹

⁸Charles J. Fox, "Two Speeches Delivered in the House of Commons," Political Tracts, Vol. 1782-1826.

⁹Quoted by Ivimey, p. 107.

Henry Vedder estimates that there were scarcely more Baptists fifty years later than there were at the accession of William III and that those of the later day were definitely victims of spiritual impoverishment.¹⁰ A statement by John Gill made in 1750 helps to confirm this judgment. He wrote:

... of late years, there has been a very visible decline; and a night is coming on, which we are entered into; the shadows of the evening are stretching out apace upon us, and the signs of the even-tide are very manifest, and which will shortly appear yet more and more. A sleepy form of spirit has seized us; both ministers and churches are asleep; and being so, the enemy is busy in sowing the tares of error and heresies, and which will grow up and spread more and more.¹¹

It has been said that never has a century risen on Christ-tain England so void of soul and faith. The spiritual reservoir from the past had been drained almost dry, and there was still no promise of any new outpouring of the Spirit in the future. The Puritans had departed and the Methodists had not arrived. Ivimey described the situation at the end of George I's reign thus:

There is reason to fear that Christians in general were at ease in Zion. The Established Church had become, in great measure, reconciled to the Dissenters; who, being left at quiet from persecution, appear to have sunk into a state of inanity and supineness. There are no proofs of either minister or people manifesting any zeal for extending the kingdom of Christ in the world. The most they seem to have expected was, that their little meeting-

¹⁰Henry Vedder, A Short History of the Baptists (Philadelphia, 1907), p. 237.

¹¹John Gill, The Watchman's Answer (London, 1750), p. 29.

houses should accommodate those families who were considered as composing the congregation, and that those should meet for worship undisturbed by the sons of Belial who were without, or by the ministry of the pastor within.¹²

Though most of the Dissenters had held up wonderfully well under the heavy hand of persecution, they were not able to endure the luxury of acceptance and worldly prosperity.

The decline of the Dissenting groups during the eighteenth century came as a great shock to those who had expected to move forward rapidly. Leaders anxiously sought reasons to explain the situation. Some of them felt that toleration itself was evidence of a deterioration of religious conviction, concluding that it was the very absence of religious fervor on the part of all groups which made it possible for each to accept the other. Others blamed the condition on conflicts within. Obviously, when pressures from without had been maintained against a particular group, it was easier to stay together for the sake of standing up against the outside foe; but now that this pressure from without had been released, pent up frictions within began to be felt and were often damaging and divisive. The General Western Association of Baptists which met in Bristol in 1700 reported:

God has given us liberty of conscience; - is this a suitable return to our God, to defile our own and offend the conscience of others? We have peace

¹²Ivimey, p. 188.

without; - is it a right improvement of it, to fall upon and devour each other within?¹³

Ministers tended to blame worldly interests for the decline. Apparently some of the Dissenters had begun to taste the wine of upper class prosperity and had developed an insatiable thirst for more. Some preachers decried attempts to make the Dissenters' freedom more complete, feeling that this was only inviting further allurements into the world of sin. Some spoke as if they preferred oppression by the state rather than furthered opportunities within the state to acquire worldly wealth. Ivimey placed the responsibility for the recession in the pulpit. He observed:

What with the anti-evangelical and moral discourses which prevailed among the principal Presbyterian ministers, the stiff regard to precision of discipline among the Independents, and the cold, dry, uninteresting, doctrinal statements of leading Baptists, had not God raised up the Methodists, men of another character from each, and uniting the excellence of all of them, the rapid decline of the churches must have gone on with accelerated motion.¹⁴

Others accounted for the decline by the low calibre of the clergy. They said:

There are scarcely any that naturally care for the estate and souls of men and who are heartily concerned for their spiritual welfare; all comparatively seek for their own things: their honour, and applause from men, their ease, reputation, and

¹³Quoted by Ivimey, p. 34.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 281.

riches; and none or few the things that are Jesus Christ's.¹⁵

A further cause may have been the very divisiveness of Christianity during this period. Such splintering of the Church no doubt issued in a valid disgust on the part of some Christians who might otherwise have remained faithful. Perhaps each of these reasons is only partially correct. It is true that the plans of the Dissenters for growth gave way to bitter disappointment and that their new-found freedom led to a leanness of soul, but perhaps it was not their fault that a complete change of climate came over the religious life of England. The age of toleration coincided with the coming of a new many-sided world of competing interests which tended to minimize the importance of religion.

Moral and Religious Outlook. The change of climate which characterized the eighteenth century can best be epitomized by one word: reason. Reason became the key word with which men tried to unlock nearly every door, some of which were ill-suited for the key. Answers which had been given by a religion of revelation were now replaced by explanations rationally conceived. Such circles of ideas as grace and salvation were put aside in favor of new circles of ideas such as nature and reason, the latter being to the vocabulary of the Enlightenment what the former had

¹⁵John Gill, A Sermon on the Death of Samuel Wilson (London, 1750), p. 34.

been to traditional Christianity. The apostles of this new dispensation were Newton and Locke. In 1695 John Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity was published, and this marked a new departure in the study of the Christian Faith. The seed planted at the close of the seventeenth century became a fruitful tree in the eighteenth. Independent thinking flourished, and questions which men had never dared ask before were now openly discussed. The doctrine of the Trinity and the miracle stories of the Bible had a head-on collision with the laws of logic. A revealed religion was regarded with suspicion, and Christianity was stripped of the supernatural.

The thinkers who formulated this new view of the universe were known as Deists. It was their contention that reason would clear up the confusion that superstition and revelation had brought about and that if reason were faithfully followed, man would still have a religion quite sufficient to meet his needs. They studied the New Testament simply as an ordinary book, trying to free their minds of all presuppositions. Some of them paradoxically brushed aside all creeds and canons while ^{others} at the same time declared that the doctrines of Christ as found in the New Testament were all men needed. There was a great deal of talk about "living according to nature." It was felt that reason would lead to an understanding of nature and that once man possessed this he could find his greatest fulfillment by

moulding his conduct accordingly. Above this neatly regulated system stood God -- far above! He was politely pushed out to the extremity of the universe into an exalted transcendent position, and men were left free to discover his wonderful laws and to solve their problems by allying their discoveries with reason. "One meets everywhere a sense of relief and escape, relief from the strain of living in a mysterious universe, and escape from ignorance and barbarisms of the Gothic centuries." ¹⁶

Men who read Newton and Locke made the illogical leap from the law of gravity to human relations and simply assumed that every area of knowledge was bounded by controllable laws. They believed that once these laws were known, all problems could be solved with ease. They by-passed speculation about the origin of evil but had very definite ideas to account for the evil of their own time. Evil and bad environment became synonymous. Customs and the historical accretions of institutions were accredited with most of the trouble, and thus, it was felt that a reordering of society was the panacea. Crane Brinton concludes that the "basic idea and striking novelty of the Enlightenment -- the idea that makes it a cosmology -- is the belief that all human beings can attain here on this earth a state of perfection hitherto in the West

¹⁶Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background (Chatto and Windus, London, 1950), p. 1.

thought to be possible only for Christians in a state of grace, and for them only after death."¹⁷

Inevitably, this new world view made itself felt in the Church -- not merely by attacks from without, but by repercussions from within. Deists and atheists joined hands in a united rejection of the organized Christianity of their day, and no one bothered to suppress any anti-clerical sentiment. The "spirit of the age" encouraged all smouldering criticisms of both church and clergy to be brought out into the open, and the spread of printing made it possible for these grievances to gain wide circulation. Within the Church the influence of Deism was unmistakable. Preachers were afraid of anything that suggested zeal or "enthusiasm," always preferring sermons which had been hammered out on the anvil of reason. The Established Church became palid and powerless in an attempt to avoid Romanism on the one hand and Puritanism on the other. When Bishop Butler was offered the Archbishopric of Canterbury, he declined it, and is alleged to have said that it was "too late for him to try to support a falling Church."¹⁸ The lamentable state of apathy or irreligion left its mark on every religious group. It was a period "of lethargy instead of activity, of worldliness instead of spirituality, of self-seeking instead of

¹⁷Crane Brinton, Ideas and Men (Prentice-Hall, New York, 1950), p. 369.

¹⁸A. C. Underwood, A History of the English Baptists (Kingsgate Press, London, 1947), p. 117.

self-denial, of grossness instead of refinement."¹⁹

As religion ebbed away, so did morality. It sank to an exceedingly low level. The open lewdness and ostentatious impiety flaunted before the public by both kings and courtiers during the Stuart period had now filtered down among the masses. Drunkenness and gambling were rife, and the amusements of the people were cruel and debasing. Bull-baiting and cock-fighting became common sports. The manners and morals even among clergymen were not above reproach. The drunken, swearing, gaming parson is a familiar character in the literature of this time. In making a moral appraisal of the period, the English Churchman, Bishop Nyle, wrote:

From the year 1700 till about the era of the French Revolution, England seemed barren of all good ... There was darkness in high places and darkness in low places; darkness in the court, the camp, the Parliament, and the bar; darkness in the country and darkness in town; darkness among rich and darkness among poor -- a gross, thick, religious and moral darkness; a darkness that might be felt.²⁰

In concluding this section, it would be unfair to leave out a positive word, for there is another side of the picture. Though religion suffered severe attacks and organized Christianity experienced serious setbacks in

¹⁹John Overton and Frederic Relton, The English Church from the Accession of George I. to the End of the Eighteenth Century (London, 1906), p. 1.

²⁰Quoted by Vedder, p. 243.

the eighteenth century, there arose to the defense of the faith men of outstanding stature who grappled with and fairly vanquished its foes. Men like William Law, Bishop Butler, and Edward Chandler, using the very weapons of the opposition, reared ramparts which have not yet been scaled. And during this time there were unquestionably many noble specimens of Christian character who quietly carried forward the faith through a living witness. Further, the Church was still regarded as the foundation stone of the Constitution, and most people could still speak of the "Throne and Altar" with a shared respect and reverence. And finally, as the century waned, the evangelical preaching of Whitefield and Wesley struck a responsive emotional chord, and then began the long road back from the barren valley of reason toward spiritual revival and strengthened faith.

II. ORIGIN OF THE PARTICULAR BAPTISTS

The Particular Baptists, among whom John Gill was to minister in the eighteenth century, had historical roots reaching far back into the seventeenth century. Though they did not become known as "Particular" Baptists until 1717, they existed as a separate group from 1644 onwards.

The origin of the Particular Baptists is somewhat obscure. It is quite definite, however, that the Parti-

cular Baptist Churches were in no way connected with the first Baptists in Britain, commonly called the General Baptists. The names of these two groups suggest the main theological barrier which stood between them. The Particular Baptists accepted the doctrine of a limited atonement, salvation for the few, while the General Baptists believed that the death of Christ was efficacious for all. The General Baptists had their beginning several decades earlier than the Particulars and were at least indirectly related to the Anabaptists of Europe. The Particular Baptists, on the other hand, had an indigenous start. They grew out of English Separatism which, by successive stages, finally came to accept believer's baptism.

The First Church. The records by which the origin of the first Particular Baptist Church is established are exceedingly sketchy and leave room for a certain amount of speculation.²¹ It can reasonably be concluded, however, that the first church appeared either in 1633 or in 1638, but in any case, the record clearly indicates that the original Particular Baptists sprang from an Independent Church in London which was organized by its first Pastor, Henry Jacob, in 1616. Jacob, like his two successors, was an ex-clergyman whose Puritanism had resulted in Separatism.

²¹MSS, sometimes called the "Kiffin Manuscript" or "The Jessey Memoranda." It may be found in the Stinton Repository at Regents Park College, Oxford. It has been printed in Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society, Vol. I, pp. 203-256.

After failing to evoke a response to a plea for toleration, he decided to give up the church he had founded in order to go to Virginia. Jacob left for America in 1622, and "at length, Jacob Lathrop, sometimes a preacher in Kent, joined to ye said congregation"²² as its second Pastor. When Lathrop took charge in 1624, troubles arose on every side. On one occasion the church was seized, and a large number of its members were imprisoned. Two years after this event, Lathrop determined to escape Archbishop Laud's high-handed policy and in 1634 emigrated to New England with thirty of his people. Those who remained behind did not succeed in getting another pastor until 1637. His name was Henry Jessey, who stayed with the church for twenty-six years.

Now within this Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey Church, as it is sometimes called, there was much discussion from time to time about baptism. This discussion inevitably magnified differences of opinion which eventuated in repeated withdrawals from the parent congregation. The first such separation recorded occurred in 1630 when a Mr. Dupper insisted that all fellowship with the parish churches should cease, arguing that the baptism of the parish clergy was invalid. There is no indication that Dupper raised any objection to infant baptism per se; his objection was apparently based primarily upon his conviction that the Church of England was no true

²²Ibid.

church. In 1633 another separation took place. This one may have been occasioned primarily by the increased size of the congregation, but the factor of baptism was again involved. The record states:

There haveing been much discussing these denying Truth of ye Parish Churches, and ye Church being now become so large yt it might be prejudicial, these following desired dismission that they might become an entire Church ...²³

Then is added a list of those who had requested dismissal along with a statement about a "Mr. Eaton with some others receiving a further baptism."²⁴ It appears that members of this group, like Mr. Dupper's following, also regarded baptism by the Established Church as ineffectual, and therefore, they submitted to a second baptism. Again, there is no clue as to their scruples about baptizing infants nor is there any suggestion of a particular mode of baptism being preferred. Those who believe that this congregation comprised the first Particular Baptist Church must base their argument on an appeal to silence. Certainly believer's baptism was practiced here, but whether the corollary convictions associated with the traditional Baptist point of view on the matter were expressed, is quite another question. It is more likely that this church was another mixed separatist congregation composed partly of Paedobaptists and partly of Antipaedobaptists.²⁵

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Champlin Burrage, The Early English Dissenters (Cambridge, 1912), Vol. I, p. 327.

The next withdrawal took place under Jessey's ministry in 1638. This time there is a definite statement that those within this group believed infants should be excluded from baptism. The record reads:

Mr. Tho: Wilson, Mr Pen, and H. Pen, and 3 more being convinced that Baptism was not for Infants, but professed Believers joyned wth Mr Jo: Spilsbury ye Churches favour being desired therein.²⁶

Little is known about John Spilsbury other than that he was steeped in Calvinist theology. In a little pamphlet believed to be from his pen, he writes, "Christ hath not presented to His Father's justice a satisfaction for the sinnes of all men; but onely for the sinnes of those that doe, or shall believe in Him; which are His Elect onely."²⁷ Here, then, are the two things which characterize Particular Baptists: a hyper-Calvinist theology embracing the doctrine of a limited atonement plus a belief in baptism for believers only. Surely, if the seceding group of 1633 was not the first Particular Baptist Church, this group uniting with Spilsbury definitely was.²⁸

²⁶Kiffin MSS.

²⁷John Spilsbury, God's Ordinance, The Saint's Privilege, (London, 1646), Title page.

²⁸Underwood, p. 58.

A fresh division from Jessey's congregation occurred in 1640 when the issue precipitating the new departure was not simply believer's baptism but a question of the mode of baptism to be administered. Half of the members rallied around a Mr. Barebone. At this point the record makes mention of a certain Richard Blunt, who "being convinced of Baptism yt also it ought to be by dipping ye Body into ye water, resembling Burial and rising again."²⁹ This same man went to Holland seeking either immersion or instruction in immersion, and when he returned he baptized Mr. Blalock, the teacher of the church, and then the two of them immersed a total of fifty-one persons. This practice rapidly spread and soon received the approval of all those of Particular Baptist persuasion. Another group splintered away from Jessey's church over this matter under the leadership of Hanserd Knollys in 1644, but the very next year, Jessey himself desired immersion and came to Knollys requesting it.

Confessions of Faith. A Confession of Faith signed by seven Particular Baptist Churches appeared in London in 1644. Five of these churches can be traced directly to the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey congregation, and the other two had early connections with it. Their Confession was formulated in an attempt to offset slanderous and prejudicial remarks which were then in popular circulation against the

²⁹Kiffin MSS.

Baptists. It was hoped that the Confession would succeed in distinguishing the Particular Baptists, not only from the infamous Anabaptists of Munster, but also from the General Baptists of Britain as well. It also served as an assertion against Presbyterian Uniformity. Excerpts from this Confession are as follows:

... and touching his creatures man, God had in Christ before the foundation of the world, according to the good pleasure of his will, fore-ordained some men to eternal life through Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of his grace. Leaving the rest in their sin to their just condemnation to the praise of his justice ... Those that have this precious faith wrought in them by the Spirit, can never finally nor totally fall away ...³⁰

It further specified that baptism is "an ordinance of the New Testament given by Christ, to be dispensed upon persons possessing faith" and that "the way and manner of dispensing this ordinance is dipping or plunging the body under water." The slanders persisted after the releasing of the Confession; therefore, a second revised Confession was issued in 1646, and this one was addressed to Parliament.

At last, when Cromwell came to power, Baptists felt they had found one who favored Independents. Many of them enlisted in his army and became active propagandists for their faith within its ranks. Baptists had no ordained or paid ministry but effectively practiced the doctrine

³⁰W. J. McGlothlin, Baptist Confessions of Faith (London, 1911), p. 175.

of the priesthood of believers, for it was during this period that the Particular Baptists advanced so rapidly in numbers that they overtook the General Baptists both in size and influence. But this opportunity for growth was not without its drawbacks. Cromwell's attitude toward Independents had also permitted Fox and his following to flourish at the partial expense of the Baptists, and many Baptist churches were hit hard by the Fifth Monarchy Movement. This kind of competition brought forth a rash of confessions designed to clarify the Baptist position and to maintain purity of doctrine. A Confession in 1651 softened some of the more rigid clauses introduced in 1646. Some scholars have maintained that these successive confessions indicate that the Particular Baptists were open-minded and always receptive to new truth. Perhaps this is so. At least they were reluctant to accept a permanent confession as a test of doctrine.

An era of severe testing began with the Restoration. Active persecution followed. Because of the suppressive measures employed by Charles II, it is difficult to obtain any particulars of Baptist activities for many of the churches were careful not to keep records which might be used as evidence against them. Now that the Presbyterians had also been pushed underground, Particular Baptists began to regard them as friends and began to realise their affinity in theology. Their Baptist Confession which

appeared in 1677 was written to show how nearly they agreed with the Westminster Confession. Another significant Confession was adopted by the General Association of Particular Baptists at their meeting in London in 1689, again evidencing extensive borrowings from the Presbyterians.

Organizational Structure. A deep gulf existed between the General and the Particular Baptists throughout the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth. This chasm was accepted by both groups, and there was no attempt toward reconciliation, nor was there much quarrelling between them (except when certain ministers of General Churches sought to swing their congregations over to the Particular group). Furthermore, there was little enthusiasm for organization even within the Particular Baptist circle. A fetish was made of the autonomy of the local church, and congregations were contented with little more than friendly correspondence between sister churches. Their organization was so loose that they shied away from anything approximating a central staff or a unifying document. The only accepted organizational structure was what was called an "association". An association consisted of a group of churches, usually in a limited geographical area, which sent representatives together periodically to help each other by counsel and advice but never with any binding power. On one occasion, in 1689, as many as

one hundred Particular Churches sent representatives to a meeting in London, but poor travel conditions made such large associations impractical.

Theological Trends. Within one section of the Particular Baptist fellowship, a hyper-Calvinist theology developed, and this proved to be a strong unifying factor among those who shared this point of view. This emphasis became increasingly vocal early in the eighteenth century. The Particular Baptist Confessions had always embodied strong Calvinist doctrines, but the first preachers had never let their Calvinism dampen their evangelical zeal. Hanserd Knollys, for example, had not hesitated to preach, "Be ye willing to receive Christ, and the work is done; open your hearts to Christ when He knocks at the door, and call you to Him; receive Him".³¹ Toward the close of the century, this manner of preaching had begun to change. Ivimey described the new approach which evolved as the "non-invitation, non-application scheme".³² These later ministers reasoned that since salvation is of the Lord and by grace alone, not all who hear the Gospel are called; and since God alone has the power to save, any exhortations to human endeavor are superfluous. This theological viewpoint among the Particular Baptists gradually hardened into a rigid system which eventually proved to be

³¹Quoted by James Culross, Hanserd Knollys (London, 1895), p. 36.

³²Ivimey, p. 267.

a blighting influence upon the growth and vitality of the churches. It was within this kind of theological atmosphere that the Particular Baptists acquired the prefix particular. Up until 1717, they had been known simply as Calvinistic Baptists, but at the London meeting (in that year) which created the famous Baptist Fund, Reverend Benjamin Stinton suggested that since participation in the fund was to be limited to Calvinistic Baptists only, its narrowed scope might be noted by naming it "The Particular Baptist Fund," referring to all those Baptists who shared the doctrine of particular redemption. His suggestion was accepted, and soon the name Particular Baptist began to be used as common terminology. In the Rules and Orders of the Particular Fund, a Particular Baptist is defined as follows:

By Particular Baptists are intended those that have been solemnly immersed in water, upon a personal confession of faith; and who profess the doctrines of Three Divine Persons in the Godhead --eternal and personal election -- original sin -- particular redemption -- efficacious grace in regeneration and sanctification -- free justification, by the imputed righteousness of Christ -- and the final perseverance of the saints -- according to the Confession of Faith that was published in London, by the Calvinistic Baptists, in the year 1689.³³

The Calvinism which waned within the Established Church during the seventeenth century and began to wilt in the Presbyterian Church during the eighteenth century was retained in Particular Baptist circles with great tenacity.

³³The documents of The Particular Baptist Fund are kept at the Baptist Union Building, 4 Southampton Row, London.

Its foremost theologian and spokesman was John Gill.

III. EARLY LIFE OF JOHN GILL

Parentage. John Gill was born at Kettering, in Northamptonshire, November 23, 1697. His parents were Edward Gill and Elizabeth Walker. A large family of Gills lived in the community as evidenced by the existent record book of the Dissenting Church at Kettering in which the name frequently recurs.³⁴ Virtually nothing is known of Gill's lineage. All the parish records before 1795 have been destroyed by fire, and there seems to be no mention of his family origin or ancestry elsewhere. Edward Gill was a wool merchant by trade, and this enabled him to meet most of the needs of his family but provided few luxuries. He has been described as a man of "grace, piety, and holy conversation."³⁵

The Dissenting congregation at Kettering was made up of Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists. This was a strongly Calvinistic group, for it followed the teachings of Joseph Hussey of Cambridge who frowned on evangelism and who deliberately refused to extend any

³⁴Church Book of what is now the Fuller Memorial Baptist Church, Kettering.

³⁵John Rippon, A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Reverend John Gill (London, 1800), p. 3.

offers of salvation in his preaching.³⁶ Besides the pastor, the church had a teaching elder, Mr. William Wallis, who was a Baptist and who caused considerable dissention when he began to administer baptism by immersion to any adult believer desiring it. The Church Book entry of October 29, 1696, records the crisis as follows:

Mr. Wm Wallis formerly a Ruling Elder in this church taking upon Him to be an Administrator of Baptism to some of ye members of this church agst whom it was prov'd in a Church assembly, yt He had no right and power so to do, desir'd His Dismission w'ch was granted Him, and accordingly He was dismissed fro being n Elder & member in this Church.³⁷

In the Brief Memoir of Gill, John Rippon³⁸ relates that Edward Gill was a member of this Dissenting congregation and that he and his wife were among those who were dismissed with William Wallis. This account seems to be erroneous, for the Church Record Book does not include their names in the list of those who withdrew at that time, nor is there any record that the Gills were ever affiliated with the Dissenting congregation. It may be surmized, however, that they joined with Wallis's group very soon after the break took place, for John Gill later speaks of William Wallis as his "spiritual father" and of his

³⁶W. T. Whitley, Calvinism and Evangelism in England (Kingsgate Press, London, n.d.), p. 13.

³⁷Fuller Memorial Church Record Book.

³⁸Gill's successor at Horsly-down.

own father as one of the deacons in the Wallis congregation.³⁹

Education. On the day John Gill was born, it is said that his father told the news to a woodman working in the yard and that the conversation happened to have been overheard by a stranger who was then passing the house. Upon hearing the news, the stranger is said to have replied, "Yes, and he will be a scholar too, and all the world cannot prevent it."⁴⁰ This uncanny prediction was speedily fulfilled, for at a very early age Edward Gill's son displayed a remarkable capacity for learning. His exceptional alertness led his parents to send him to the local grammar-school sooner than he normally would have gone, for he had quickly surpassed those of his own age. The boy was not a prodigy; his advances were rather the result of an uncommon diligence and discipline. Before eleven years of age, he had already read most of the Latin classics and had acquired such a proficiency in Greek that neighboring clergymen commended him. Whenever the town bookseller's shop was open, young John Gill could always be found there. His presence there was indeed so regular that it became a popular saying (with those who desired to express their certainty of something), "It is as sure as that John Gill

³⁹Rippon, p. 6.

⁴⁰Sermons and Tracts (London, 1814), Introduction, Vol. I, p. vi.

is in the bookseller's shop."⁴¹

Many stumbling blocks were put in the way of Gill's receiving an education. When he was only eleven, his grammar-school instruction terminated abruptly because his teacher had insisted that every pupil go with him to prayers each day at the parish church. Gill's parents became indignant over this imposition and saw no alternative but to remove their son from this man's tutelage. Unfortunately, their family finances were not sufficient to support him at a school away from home, but they had hoped that appeals to friends and various funds would succeed in providing some way for the boy to continue his studies. But there was no response; every door was closed. It was at this point that John Gill's formal education ceased.

Despite the misfortune of discontinuing school, the young student determined to keep up his studies. Without the guidance of teachers, he proceeded to teach himself. Logic, rhetoric, natural and moral philosophy, and Hebrew were all included in his self-instructed curriculum. He improved his Latin by advanced reading in various fields of literature, particularly the theological treatises of European professors. It may have been during these teenage years that he made his first acquaintance with Herman Witsius whose theological system was to be so influential

⁴¹Rippon, p. 4.

in his own thought and writings later. As a Dissenter, Gill was automatically excluded from the two universities, so as he approached maturity, he acquiesced in employment in his father's business. Even then, however, his free hours were always spent with his books.

Profession of Faith. In a time of discouragement about his inability to continue his education, a neighboring clergyman gave Gill a piece of advice that he never forgot. Later in life when he was writing a Preface to a volume of hymns by a Mr. R. Davis of Rothwell, he recalled how this man had once admonished him with the following word of wisdom:

Si Christum bene scis, satis est, si caetera nescis,
Si Christum nescis, nihil est, si caetera discis.⁴²

John Gill first came to know Christ within the home in which he was reared. The religious interests of his parents impressed him irrevocably, and no doubt their influence was one of the major factors which eventually led him to hear God's Call to the ministry. Even before he was born, his father is reported to have had strong premonitions that his child would be a son and that he would one day prove of ^e [?] imminent service to the Baptist cause.⁴³ Such a sentiment as this leads one to guess that

⁴²John Gill, See Preface to Hymns by R. Davis (London, 1748), "If you know Christ well, it is no matter, though you are ignorant of many other things; if you are ignorant of Christ, other knowledge will avail but little."

⁴³Sermons and Tracts, p. xi.

there must have been subtle persuasiveness toward this end throughout his childhood and adolescence. He was brought up in an environment which conjured up pictures of hell and painted ecstatic visions of heaven; which of these was most influential in inspiring his Christian decision is difficult to determine. He tells of a sermon preached by William Wallis which filled him with fear of judgment for his sins. The text, "Where art thou?"⁴⁴ resounded in his soul until he became aware of his condition and need for the Saviour. Because of his youth, however, he postponed the solemnity of a public profession until he was nineteen years old; meanwhile, he familiarized himself with the Gospel doctrines and the promises of God. He was reluctant to profess his faith because he realised that the eyes of the church were upon him as a possible candidate for the ministry. On November 1, 1716, Gill declared his conversion to the church and testified to the dealings of God with his soul to the satisfaction of the congregation and the new Pastor, Mr. Thomas Wallis (who had now succeeded Mr. William Wallis). On the same day of his profession of faith, he was baptized by immersion in a nearby river before a large company of people. In anticipation of this event, Gill composed the following hymn which shows how seriously he received his baptism:

⁴⁴Rippon, p. 6. (Text: Genesis 3:9).

Was Christ baptized to sanctify
 This ordinance He gave?
 And did his sacred body lie
 Within the liquid grave?

Did Jesus condescend so low
 To leave us an example?
 And sha'n't we by this pattern go;
 This heavenly rule so ample?

What rich and what amazing grace!
 What love beyond degree!
 That we the heavenly road should trace,
 And should baptized be.

That we should follow Christ the Lamb,
 In owning his commands;
 For what we do, He did the same,
 Tho' done with purer hands.

And does this offer to my faith,
 How Christ for me did die;
 And how He in the grave was laid
 And rose to justify?

Then how should this engage my heart
 To live to Christ that died;
 And with my cursed sins to part,
 Which pierc'd his precious side?⁴⁵

The hymn was sung at the service.

Having thus successfully fulfilled the requirement of witnessing to his faith, and having submitted to the ordinance of baptism, Gill was then formally received as a member of the church the next Sunday, November 4, and he was invited to partake of the Lord's Supper for the first time. In the evening of the same day, at an informal gathering in the home of one of the members, Gill addressed a small group, expounding the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. When he had finished his talk, one of the brethren

⁴⁵Sermons and Tracts, pp. xii-xiii.

rose and replied, "Friend, we take this as a beginning of the exercise of your ministerial gift, which we are persuaded the Lord has bestowed upon you."⁴⁶ Accordingly, on the following Sunday, Gill was again requested to interpret the Scriptures, and once more he was acclaimed by all who heard him as being exceptionally qualified for the ministry. His chosen text for that occasion was: "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified," and he spoke with much conviction.⁴⁷ Rippon comments, "It was a charming season to the godly people."⁴⁸

Ministry at Higham-Ferrers. Despite John Gill's remarkable achievements, there were still those who felt it was imperative for him to seek further education. Some friends of the family in London instigated an arrangement with the Reverend John Davis of Higham-Ferrers, a learned man, who consented to take Gill into his home where it was hoped he would receive guidance in his studies while he assisted in the church.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, this proved to be a disappointing relationship in so far as the academic help was concerned, but the situation did afford many opportunities for preaching, not only in Higham-Ferrers, but in many other nearby villages as well. And since Higham-Ferrers was only six miles distance from Kettering, he

⁴⁶Ibid., p. xi.

⁴⁷I Corinthians 2:2.

⁴⁸Rippon, p. 8

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 9.

also remained actively affiliated with his home church. Further help from his London friends came in the form of a financial allocation from the newly setup Baptist Fund for the education of young ministers.⁵⁰ Though the sum amounted to only eight pounds, it is interesting to note that John Gill was one of the first recipients of assistance from this source.

While at Higham-Ferrers, Gill met Elizabeth Negus who was a member of the church there, and after less than a year's acquaintance, they were married in 1718. Gill always felt that this meeting was God's principle providential reason for sending him to that place. From this union came many children, all of whom died in their infancy except three. A daughter, Elizabeth, died in her thirteenth year in 1738, but a second daughter, Mary, and a son, John, survived their parents. The Gill's shared forty-six years of marriage until the death of Mrs. Gill in 1764.

Just after the wedding in Higham-Ferrers, word came from Kettering that Mr. Thomas Wallis wanted Gill to come back home to help him in the church there. His stay in Higham-Ferrers had been brief, scarcely a year, and this new assignment with Wallis was destined to last only a matter of months. In the beginning of the year 1719,

⁵⁰Ivimey, p. 158.

Gill received an invitation to preach a trial sermon in the meeting-house at Horsly-down, Southwark, less than a mile from London-bridge. The death of the Reverend Benjamin Stinton, who had ably served this church, had created a vacancy in the pastoral office there, and John Gill was among those suggested as his possible successor.

CHAPTER II

FIRST YEARS IN LONDON

I. THE CALL TO HORSLEY-DOWN

When John Gill realised that the congregation at Horsley-down was interested in him, he was justly pleased. It was a compliment for so young a man to be considered for such a choice situation. The past leadership of the church had made it an influential one in Baptist circles, and the new minister would be expected to perpetuate this reputation. Reverend Benjamin Keach had been the first minister to the church. He founded the congregation in 1672 when he withdrew from a ministry among the General Baptists in order to change over with the Baptists of Calvinist persuasion. Very few General Baptists made this transition; Keach was the outstanding exception. He was succeeded in the pastorate by his son-in-law, Benjamin Stinton, a public-spirited man, who was well known and widely respected. It was his death that created the vacancy for which John Gill was now regarded as a candidate.

Either some of the members of the congregation had heard Gill preach elsewhere, or some influential friend

in London¹ had given him a strong recommendation, for Gill was invited to preach at Horsly-down during the months of April and May, 1719. Two months later the church requested his return for further preaching, and Thomas Crosby, one of the deacons, wrote to the church at Kettering for a statement of Gill's character. Within a few days a letter was received from the Reverend Thomas Wallis in which he stated: "His being effectually called by grace out of darkness into the marvelous light of the glorious Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ hath been evidently manifested amongst us and his conversion hath been unblemished."² Everything now seemed in order for the congregation to vote; on Sunday, September 13, the matter was put before the church, and Gill was elected -- though not unanimously.

Division of the Church. This election caused a crisis in the church. In Rippon's account of it, he completely glossed over the sordid facts which follow, but in the Church Record Book, the whole sad story is told in full.³ It seems that some of the members had been very much opposed to Gill from the very beginning, partly on account of his youth, and chiefly because of his way of preaching⁴ and "certain points

¹Probably Reverend John Noble, minister of the Great Eastcheap Church. Noble had been influential in putting Gill's educational plight before the Particular Baptist Fund.

²Church Record Book of what is now The Metropolitan Tabernacle, London; entry August 29, 1719.

³Ibid.

⁴Sermons and Tracts, p. xiii.

in his manner."⁵ It is difficult to discern more specifically just what the objections were, but there can be no doubt that they were strongly felt. On the Monday after the election, a Mr. Bennet sent a message to Gill asking him to meet with a committee at Blackwell's Coffee House the next day. Gill consented to come, and there found himself confronted by members of the dissatisfied minority who sought to discourage him from accepting the call. They gave him a statement signed by twenty-one persons who registered their disapproval of the church's proceedings,⁶ but Gill ignored their warnings and officially accepted the call the following Sunday. Determined not to be outdone, the disgruntled group then scheduled another church meeting; comprising a majority of those present, they re-voted and rejected Gill, and declared the previous church action concerning him to be invalid. This maneuver provoked an immediate response from Gill's supporters. On the next Sunday they issued the following straightforward reprisal:

We whose names are hereunto subscribed as members of the church of Christ lately under the pastoral care of the Rev. Mr. Stinton do protest against the irregular proceedings of the church meeting on Tuesday, September 22, 1719, and do resolve to stand by the choice made of Mr. Gill to be the pastor of the said church.⁷

⁵Charles Hadden Spurgeon, The Metropolitan Tabernacle: Its History and Work (London, 1876), p. 37.

⁶Some of these names were suspected of being forged.

⁷Church Record Book.

Now the sides were clearly drawn, and each group sought to override the other. The next move came from the dissenting minority which raised the question of the legality of the first election. They pointed out that it was the woman's vote that had given Gill the majority and maintained that women should not have been permitted to vote. Gill's following insisted that the election had been fair and was final, and fearing that further bickering might precipitate a larger breach in the congregation, they expressed their desire that those who were dissatisfied with the choice of Gill should peaceably and quietly withdraw from the church. This ultimatum split the church. Surprisingly, however, it was the group favorable to Gill which did the withdrawing (probably because several of the strongest church leaders were against Gill). They withdrew to Thomas Crosby's nearby schoolhouse and left the Goat Yard Chapel (as the meeting-house was called) in the possession of nearly half the congregation which remained. Each group declared itself to be the original church, and the dispute continued.

An attempt at reconciliation was made by referring the whole affair to the club of ministers meeting at the Hanover Coffee-house. They gave the absurd advice that the two parties should come together and each take turn about hearing their choice of candidates until the whole membership could agree. It is probably fortunate that this religious

duel never took place. Later, a further overture was made by the dissatisfied group. They requested another vote and suggested that, in the meantime, that Gill be accepted as a probationer, but Gill's supporters re-affirmed that their action had been done regularly and would stay as done. During all of this squabbling, Gill was somewhere in the background (probably having returned to Kettering), but the record states that on March 20, 1720, his friends in the schoolhouse unanimously renewed their call, and he again accepted.⁸

After all seemed settled, there was a surprising sequel. The members who had retained the Goat Street Chapel surrendered it to Gill and his friends, while they moved to a new meeting-house built in Unicorn Yard.⁹ Perhaps this is an indication that the feeling between the two disagreeing parties had not been so fierce as might be imagined. Indeed, Ivimey almost implies that what happened within the congregation at Horsly-down was a normal course of events. He writes:

All the members having an equal right to choose a minister whose knowledge and gifts are considered best adapted for their individual edification, it is not surprising that differences of judgment should exist, even among people equally wise and equally pious. In such cases there remains no alternative, but for the dissatisfied parties to remove their communion from a church, where a min-

⁸Church Record Book.

⁹This group eventually ceased to exist.

ister whom they disapprove is settled as the pastor.¹⁰

The Ordination Service. It is a custom in Baptist Churches that a man is not ordained into the ministry until he has received a call to a specific church. For this reason, John Gill had not yet been ordained. The Ordination Service was scheduled for March 22, 1720, and on that day, several of London's best known Baptist preachers were present to participate in the proceedings.¹¹ The Reverend John Skepp, author of a well known book entitled Divine Energy, and the Reverend John Noble, Pastor of the flourishing Great Eastcheap Church, were the principal speakers. Following the formal exchange of questions and answers to the church and to Mr. Gill, verifying the call and his acceptance, Gill was duly ordained through a service of the laying on of hands; and with him were ordained three deacons. Then Mr. Noble delivered an exhortation to the new Pastor and deacons from Acts 20:28, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Next, Mr. Skepp addressed the church from Hebrews 13:17, "Obey them that have rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls..." At the conclusion of the service, the congregation was dismissed with a prayer

¹⁰Ivimey, p. 53.

¹¹Rippon, pp. 12-13.

by the new Pastor, the Reverend John Gill. Looking back upon this occasion, Charles Hadden Spurgeon remarked:

Little did the friends dream what sort of man they had thus chosen to be their teacher; but had they known it, they would have rejoiced that a man of such vast erudition, such indefatigable industry, such sound judgement, and such sterling honesty, had come among them.¹²

Quarrel with Thomas Crosby. Beginning a pastorate after such unfortunate controversy over his coming, made the first years of Gill's work exceedingly difficult. Perhaps they would have been difficult in any case, for he was a young man of only twenty-two years with very little experience. He worked hard, however, and soon received encouraging results, but the weight of his new responsibilities began to excise heavy penalties. Shortly after his ministry commenced, his health declined, and he became subject to frequent fevers and fainting spells. In 1723 these disorders became so aggravated that his very life was endangered, but gradually, he improved and gained sufficient strength to meet the demands of a full and active career.¹³

It is probably more than a coincidence that Gill's physical breakdown occurred at the time of his quarrel with Thomas Crosby, who later became the author of the four

¹²Spurgeon, p. 40.

¹³Rippon, p. 20.

volume History of English Baptists. He was the only deacon from the original Horsly-down congregation who had championed Gill. From the very first, he had been the leader of the pro-Gill group; he offered his schoolhouse for a meeting place and promoted Gill's interest in every way he could. Crosby continued to have a major voice in all church affairs in the early years of Gill's ministry, and he probably offered much unwanted advice to the new young inexperienced preacher. Friction was inevitable. It may be guessed that the showdown came when Crosby voiced disapproval of the content of Gill's sermons, for as this thesis will illustrate, Gill was a thorough-going Calvinist of the most extreme variety, one who drove home his theology with uncompromising dogmatism. Crosby's History indicates that he had very little sympathy for such an extreme point of view; he even urged that the differences between the General and the Particular Baptists be minimized so that the gulf separating them might be bridged. In the Introduction to his History, he wrote:

Indeed, I must confess, that this distinction always seemed to me as unreasonable as it is uncharitable, and would men but lay aside their prejudices, I doubt not but a free conversation with one another would soon remove it.¹⁴

It is inconceivable that a deacon in Gill's congregation should express such a sentiment as this! Crosby's enthu-

¹⁴Crosby, Vol. I, "To the Reader."

siasm for Gill gradually cooled, and eventually, he made positive attempts to undermine Gill's ministry. Again, the church record bears witness to the truth. The entry for March 26, 1723, reads:

The church than proceeded to take notice of other charges brought against him (Thomas Crosby), viz: for raising slanderous and scandalous reports upon the pastor of this church and his wife, witnesses and evidences of which being produced, it appeared to the church that he was guilty of the same, then it was agreed that he be suspended from his communion until such time that he makes his appearance and either makes good the charges or acknowledges his evils in so doing, and accordingly was suspended.¹⁵

This severe judgment caused Crosby to leave the church and to join the others of the original congregation at Unicorn Yard; thus Gill lost one of his strongest supporters.

II. ESTABLISHING A REPUTATION

Initial Publications. Despite the initial handicaps which stood in his way, Gill not only measured up to what his people expected of him, but he soon became known and acclaimed beyond his own congregation. His preaching proved so satisfactory that the services were well attended, and sometimes the presence of visitors filled the meeting-house.¹⁶ In 1724, he began a series of sermons based upon the Song of Solomon. Preached on successive Sunday

¹⁵Church Record Book.

¹⁶Rippon, p. 20.

mornings for over two years, this comprised a total of one hundred and twenty-two sermons! They were received so well that the congregation prevailed upon him to make them public. Gill responded with his first major publication, An Exposition of Solomon's Song, in 1728.¹⁷ Gill did not need much encouragement to publish the sermons for he felt that they would do much toward establishing the divine inspiration of the Song. Several contemporary writers had argued that the Book was a spurious writing which should never have been included in the Old Testament Canon. A pamphlet which argued in this vein¹⁸ was the original inducement for Gill's having undertaken the Exposition; therefore, it is not surprising that he prefaced the work with an attempt to answer all of the objections raised. He stated his purpose precisely:

...considering that the authority and usefulness of this book are called in question in this loose and degenerate age; in which not only this, but all Scripture is ridiculed and burlesqued; and the great doctrines of faith therein contained, treated with the utmost sneer and contempt; and therefore, (I) would willingly contribute all I can towards the vindicating of this or any other part of the sacred writings; which, being given by inspiration of God, are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.¹⁹

¹⁷John Gill, An Exposition of Solomon's Song (London, 1728).

¹⁸W. Whiston, A Supplement to Mr. Whiston's Late Essay toward Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament (London, 1723).

¹⁹Exposition of Solomon's Song, 4th ed., The Preface.

The modern reader of Gill's Exposition is likely to conclude that the extent to which he succeeded in fulfilling his purpose is not due so much to the text of the Scripture as it is to the fertility of Gill's imagination. Even the most earthy passages are given sublime interpretations, and incredible conclusions are drawn from the faintest suggestions. For example, the phrase, "My breasts like towers,"²⁰ is explained to be a reference to "ministers of the Gospel who, like nurses, feed sincere milk of the word"; or "to the two Testaments full of the milk of excellent doctrine"; or yet again, "to the two ordinances, breasts of consolation to believers."²¹ It must have been in anticipation of such a passage as this that led Gill to remark in his Preface that one should not be too positive in explaining Scripture which is so very mystical and abstruse.²² Even so, the publication of the Exposition brought wide recognition to Gill and introduced him to many people who became his friends. The highest compliment came from his friend, Reverend James Hervey, who, in his Theron and Aspasio, recommended the work, saying:

It has such a copious vein of sanctified invention running through it, and is interspersed with such a variety of delicate and brilliant images, as cannot but highly entertain a curious mind. It pre-

²⁰Song of Solomon 8:10.

²¹Exposition of Solomon's Song, p. 613.

²²Ibid., The Preface.

sents us also with such rich and charming displays of the glory of Christ's person, the freeness of his grace to sinners, and the tenderness of his love to the church, as cannot but administer the most exquisite delight to the believing soul. Considered in both these views, I think the work resembles the paradisaical garden described by Milton, in which

'Blossoms and fruit at once of golden hue
Appeared, with gay enamell'd colours mix'd.'²³

A fourth edition of this work was published as late as 1776. Rippon remarks that wherever the book was read, it commended Gill to the esteem of spiritual persons and that "no one effort from his pen has been more useful to devotional Christians."²⁴

Gill's second major work also grew out of a series of sermons. Like the Exposition of Solomon's Song, it was inspired by the need to reply to another publication with which he disagreed. A book entitled, The Scheme of Literal Prophecy Considered, by Anthony Collins²⁵ (who maintained that the character of the Messiah could not be established from the prophecies of the Old Testament without a mystical and allegorical exegesis), was brought to Gill's attention, and he was challenged to answer it. He did so, first, through a series of sermons which dealt with all the prophecies relating to the Messiah (considered in

²³James Hervey, Theron and Aspasio (London, 1767), 5th ed., Vol. III, p. 145 (footnote).

²⁴Rippon, p. 24.

²⁵Anthony Collins, The Scheme of Literal Prophecy Considered (London, 1726).

chronological order according to their fulfillment in the life of Jesus), and then, as a further reply to Collins, he published extracts from his sermons under the title, The Prophecies of the Old Testament, Respecting the Messiah, Considered and Proved to be Literally Fulfilled in Jesus.²⁶ Illustrative of the content of this book is Gill's exegesis of Genesis 3:15, which he lists as the first prophetic reference to the Messiah. The verse reads, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel," and Gill concludes his consideration of the text thus:

From this first prophecy, we learn, that the Messiah was to be incarnate, born of a woman, and not begotten by man; that he was to suffer and die; as also that he was to destroy Satan and his works, which Jesus has done: and it may be observed, that salvation was proclaimed as soon as sin was committed, and a prophecy of a Messiah given forth, as soon as there was any need of one.²⁷

With such exposition as this, Gill fails to convince the modern reader that these prophecies are to be understood in their "first, literal, and obvious sense";²⁸ but many readers of his own generation praised the work as a significant step toward confuting the Deistical writers of the day; and so,

²⁶John Gill, The Prophecies of the Old Testament, Respecting the Messiah, Considered and Proved to be Literally Fulfilled in Jesus (London, 1728).

²⁷Ibid., p. 13

²⁸Rippon, p. 27.

Gill's growing reputation was further established.

The Great Eastcheap Lectureship. Gradually, Gill's circle of admirers began to include persons from denominations other than his own. Also, members of other Baptist Churches desired to have an opportunity to hear him regularly. A group of people from this wider acquaintance proposed that they form themselves into a society and set up a week-day lectureship for Mr. Gill. The idea met with immediate approval, and as soon as sufficient subscribers were received to support it, they invited him to undertake the project. He willingly consented. Arrangements were made for the lectures to be given in the handsome new meeting-house at Great Eastcheap where Gill's friend, John Noble, was the Pastor. On a Wednesday evening, early in 1729, the lectureship began, and it continued almost without interruption for the next twenty-five years! This assignment turned out to be an exceedingly fruitful one for Gill. He used the lectureship as a kind of workshop, presenting there in first draft form nearly everything he published during those years. His treatises on the Trinity, Justification, and The Cause of God and Truth had their first public hearing at Great Eastcheap. It was also there that he formulated large sections of his Biblical commentary.

III. FORMULATING A THEOLOGY

During the first few years of Gill's ministry, his theological ideas were becoming crystallized into a set system. There is no way of ascertaining to what extent his theological outlook had developed before he reached London, but it is certain that he had been exposed to a very strong Calvinistic influence in his youth. His home church at Kettering definitely leaned toward a high Calvinism and is known to have favorably regarded Joseph Hussey, of Cambridge, who was a proponent of the extreme Calvinistic view.²⁹ It is quite clear that this same Joseph Hussey's thought is reflected in Gill, but it is by no means clear that Gill's indebtedness to Hussey can be traced directly to Kettering. Rather, it appears that Hussey's thought reached Gill through one of Hussey's most ardent disciples in London, the Reverend John Skepp. Skepp was completely saturated with Hussey's theological ideas, and he was a man whom Gill knew well and greatly admired.

Indebtedness to Joseph Hussey. The stream of thought which originated with Joseph Hussey must first be considered at its source. Hussey was a Congregational minister at Cambridge who wrote a book entitled, God's Operations of Grace but No Offers of Grace.³⁰ In this book, he made a sharp

²⁹Whitley, p. 13.

³⁰Joseph Hussey, God's Operations of Grace but No Offers of Grace (London, 1792), 3rd ed.



distinction between the words offer and gift. A gift, he said, is always effectual, but an offer is sometimes ineffectual.³¹ Gifts are always graciously received; offers are often spurned. Hussey insisted that, therefore, it is wrong to speak of offering Christ to sinners, for this falsely implies (1) that Christ died for all, and (2) that sinners have the will to reject Him if they so choose; whereas, in truth, he maintained, God's grace can never be rejected by those whom He intends to receive it. God does not effect the conversion of the elect by offers of grace; He does so without any assistance whatsoever from the person involved; He completely effects the conversion by His own operations. Offers are but propositions which have no binding power or guaranteed consequences; operations, on the other hand, are active principles which work toward their ordained ends without any possibility of frustration.³² God cannot act fallaciously: only those whom he desires to save will be saved, and nothing man can do will either secure or cancel his salvation. The elect and the non-elect are unalterably determined by God, whose divine intentions are totally carried out by His irresistible operations. Therefore, Hussey concluded, the salvation of the Gospel should be offered to no one.³³ In the first place, it would be sheer impertinence

³¹Ibid., p. 79.

³²Ibid., p. 154.

³³Ibid., p. 127.

to do so, as if to presume upon God; and in the second place, to do so would be completely superfluous, for the end result would in any case remain the same. Thus, there can be no attempt to awaken the conscience of the unconverted as if to secure the Holy Spirit, for God's salvation will come only to those whom He has pleased to grant it, and the glory of converting and sanctifying the souls of the elect must belong only to Him.

Does this mean that the Gospel is not to be preached? Hussey would reply both "yes" and "no". Once more, he made a distinction between doctrine and salvation, pointing out that the Gospel consists of a combination of these two. It is permissible to "preach the doctrine," but it is not permissible to "propound salvation."³⁴ The preacher must never offer Christ to man, though he may testify of Christ to man. This alone is the preacher's task, and only this is needed to attain God's "true ends." By preaching doctrine, all men will become informed about the workings of God whether they are among the elect or the non-elect. If those who hear are the elect, they will recognize the report of the preacher to be true when God's operation of grace descends upon them; and if those who hear are the non-elect, even they will become familiar with the workings of God and will praise Him for the advantages of His providence. In this way, God's mercy is

³⁴Ibid., pp. 126-27.

glorified by the special grace with which He saves the elect, while at the same time, the denial of this special grace to the non-elect, glorifies His justice. Briefly, this is the theology emphasized by Joseph Hussey. When his book appeared, it was hailed by some as an outstanding contribution to Christian thought, but those who so regarded it were decidedly in the minority.³⁵

The Influence of John Skepp. One of the converts to Hussey's theology was John Skepp, who was at one time a member of Hussey's church at Cambridge and who later became the minister of the Curriers Hall Baptist Church in London. Following Hussey, he reasoned that if Christ died not for all but for the elect only, it was wrong to invite all men to repent and to believe in Him. Skepp is best known for his book, Divine Energy, which was written to prove that divine energy alone is all that is absolutely necessary to renew the heart of an unconverted sinner.³⁶ He likened the sinner to

³⁵Reverend Abraham Taylor made the following comment about Hussey: "This odd fancy (Hussey's theology) was started about thirty years since, by a gentleman of a great deal of rambling learning, but a confused head, as appears from his writings, some parts of which, I will venture to say, no person ever really understood: ... but as there are always persons in the world of an odd turn of mind, this was reckon'd a most wonderful discovery, and he was cried up by them as the greatest light that had been since the apostles days." From An Address to Young Students in Divinity (London, 1739), p. 14.

³⁶John Skepp, Divine Energy (London, 1815), 3rd ed.

the man in Luke's parable who had fallen among thieves. No amount of moral persuasion could have lifted that man out of the ditch; only the mercy and the hand of another were able to rescue him.³⁷ "Man is first a patient under the Spirit's hand before he is able to be a doer of his will."³⁸ Skepp's fear of Arminianism and Pelagianism paralyzed his preaching. He was so careful (lest he awaken the conscience of the unconverted and thus despoil God of the sole glory) that he cautiously avoided any exhortations and consistently refused to make any offer of salvation to unbelievers.

John Skepp was the first Baptist minister to adopt this extreme form of Calvinism. It was he who introduced the "non-invitation, non-application" scheme to other Baptist ministers.³⁹ He must bear a large share of the responsibility for extinguishing evangelical zeal among Particular Baptists and for inaugurating his preaching technique of simply expounding doctrine.⁴⁰ Other Particular Baptist ministers before Skepp, who were also committed to Calvinist theology, had freely addressed the unconverted. Notable among these were such leaders as Benjamin Keach and Benjamin Stinton who preceeded Gill at Horsly-down. With the coming of Gill, however, the preaching tradition of that church definitely changed.

³⁷Ibid., p. 82

³⁹Ivimey, p. 267.

³⁸Ibid., p. 207

⁴⁰Underwood, pp. 134-35.

Very early in his ministry, Gill patterned his preaching after that of John Skepp and accepted his theological point of view regarding evangelism. The fact that Skepp was the principle speaker at Gill's ordination symbolizes the continuing influence he exerted over his younger colleague.

Throughout his entire ministry, Gill had a high opinion of Skepp. It was Skepp, for example, who kindled Gill's desire to obtain a more extensive knowledge of Hebrew and Rabbinnical literature. He led him to see the immense importance of studies in this field for a better understanding of Biblical concepts and customs. Skepp had become very well read in this literature and had accumulated a valuable collection of Targums, Talmuds, and ancient commentaries, which Gill was fortunate in purchasing at the time of Skepp's death.⁴¹ Another testimony to Gill's great admiration of Skepp is the fact that he edited and republished Skepp's book, Divine Energy, in 1751. In the "Recommendatory Preface" of this edition, Gill referred to him as "being personally and intimately known by me, and his memory precious to me"; and in commenting upon the content of the book, he said: "The subject-matter of this treatise ... is of the greatest moment and importance."⁴² Undoubtedly, the person who most influenced Gill's theology was John Skepp.

⁴¹The records of the Particular Baptist Fund show that an allocation of seventeen pounds, ten shillings, was made to Gill in 1724-25 for educational purchases. He probably used this sum to buy Skepp's books.

⁴²Skepp, p. xii.

Ideas from the Continent. The roots of Gill's theology, however, reached back beyond both Skepp and Hussey to a source common to them all. All three of these men were heirs to a continental school of thought known as Covenant Theology. In the seventeenth century, due to the immigration of many distinguished Protestant teachers from France, Holland became more the center of theological activity than Switzerland. The most eminent representative of the Calvinist thought which developed there was John Cocceius. His ideas precipitated a bitter controversy and created a school of followers who adopted his theological system. Cocceius formulated a type of theology which expressed the relationship between God and man in terms of covenants, the Covenant of the Law and the Covenant of Grace. These were defined as legal agreements formally entered into by two contracting parties. In the first instance, the Covenant of the Law, God entered into an agreement with Adam and his posterity; and in the second instance, the Covenant of Grace, He covenanted with Christ for the salvation of His elect. The whole system was evolved in an attempt to uphold God's absolute sovereignty and to reconcile this major premise with man's assurance of salvation. God's eternal decrees destined every man to either salvation or to reprobation, and man's highest virtue consists in willingly submitting

to his destiny.⁴³ One of Cocceius's outstanding disciples was Hermann Witsius, a Professor at the University of Utrecht, who introduced this type of theology to England. His magnum opus, De Oeconomia Foederum Dei cum Homnibus Libri, was known to John Gill before it was translated into English.⁴⁴ Quotations from Witsius are scattered through many of Gill's writings; he leaned upon him most heavily in his Body of Divinity. Another man of the same school, whom Gill also quoted as an authority, was Johannes Hoornebeck, a Professor at the University of Leyden. Although it appears that Gill was initially introduced to these Dutch Divines through English interpreters of their thought, he was, nonetheless, inestimably indebted to them for the main structure of his theological system.

A Biblical Basis. Gill thought of himself as a Biblical theologian. He heartily subscribed to the Baptist principle that the Bible is the only rule of faith and practice. It is significant to note that his Exposition of the Bible preceded the publication of his Body of Divinity; this, for him, was the only proper sequence. He regarded the Scriptures as a sacred Book through which evangelical truths were scattered, and he thought the task of the theologian was simply to gather them up together

⁴³James Hastings, "Covenant Theology", Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (Edinburgh, 1908), Vol. IV, p. 218.

⁴⁴Hermann Witsius, The Economy of the Covenants (Edinburgh, 1804), 2 Vol., translated by William Crookshank.

in an orderly way.⁴⁵ He defined theology as a "treatise on the science of divine things, sacred truths, and Christian doctrines, taken out of Scripture ..."⁴⁶

Allegedly, at least, Gill always based his theological system on an appeal to the Bible as a final authority. He accepted it almost literally as the Word of God, though not in the sense of an articulate voice or as written by His finger. He described the penmen as men who were "directed, dictated, and inspired," who "did not speak and write of their own head, and out of their own brains, not according to their will."⁴⁷ He insisted that it is not sufficient to believe that God gave these men general ideas to clothe with their own words. Not simply thoughts, but the very words were given, and these were given in the original Hebrew and Greek. For this reason, all translations are subject to error; and therefore, every trained theologian must be a thorough student of the Biblical languages.⁴⁸ Gill endeavored to prove the claim of the Scripture to a divine authority by listing the following evidences:

1. the subject-matter of Scripture (the Creation, prophecies, and supernatural truths).
2. the masterful documents from the pens of uneducated men.

⁴⁵John Gill, A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity (London, 1796), Vol. I, new ed., p. ii. (Hereafter referred to as Body).

⁴⁶Ibid., p. x. ⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 16-17. ⁴⁸Ibid., p. 18.

3. the effects of Scripture upon men.
4. the testimony within Scripture (such as the miracles).
5. the authoritative manner in which it is expressed.
6. the sublimity of its style.
7. the amazing perspicuity of the writings.
8. the long continuance and preservation of them.
9. the awful judgments of God on those who have despised them.⁴⁹

As a divine authority, the Bible is the only valid sourcebook for the discovery and the defining of Christian doctrine. All human and unwritten traditions, all dreams and visions, and all revelations and prophecies of later ages are excluded. The Bible needs no supplement. Within its pages can be found everything necessary to salvation and everything that ought to be believed and done.⁵⁰ Gill recognized the fact that some words and phrases a theologian may use are not literally expressed in Scripture, and he accepted the right of the theologian to employ these if the sense in which they are meant is there.⁵¹ Nor is every doctrine expressed in so many words -- the doctrine of the Trinity, for example -- but in any case, the fact that the doctrine is signified in Scripture must be clear

⁴⁹John Gill, An Exposition of the Old Testament (London, 1763), Vol. I, pp. v-viii.

⁵⁰Body I, p. 26.

⁵¹Ibid., p. viii.

and plain. There is no spiritual truth, no evangelical doctrine, other than that contained in the Scriptures; indeed, "they are called the Scriptures of truth not only because they come from the God of Truth, and whatsoever is in them is truth; but they contain all truth."⁵²

Although every book of the Bible is profitable for doctrine, some sections of Scripture are more edifying than others. There are passages with "such depth than an elephant may swim" and others with "such shallows that a lamb may wade."⁵³ Moreover, Gill explained that the light of the Scriptures has been a growing one, beginning very dimly under the dispensation of the Law of Moses and becoming more clear in the writings of the prophets; but most clear under the Gospel dispensation.⁵⁴ Yet, no verse of Scripture should be cast aside or considered inferior. The doctrines of salvation are to be found from Genesis to Revelation, and references to Christ are plentiful throughout the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament.⁵⁵ It is true that certain passages may seem most obscure and that others are very difficult to understand, but this was God's way of humbling the pride of the arrogant and of ex-

⁵²Ibid., p. 28.

⁵³Gill, Exposition of the Old Testament, p. vii.

⁵⁴Body I, p. 30.

⁵⁵John Gill, The Agreement of the Old and New Testaments (London, 1756), a sermon.

citing closer attention to the text.

The Bible is not only the repository of doctrinal truths; it is also an armory for doctrinal defense. It is like a two-edged sword which may be used either to protect the faith or to destroy the heretic. The Scriptures are serviceable not simply as a source of truth but also for the detection, confutation, and conviction of error. "There never was an error, or heresy, broached in the world yet but what has been confuted by the Scriptures," Gill maintained, "and it is not possible that anyone can rise in opposition to the 'faith once believed', but what may receive its refutation from them."⁵⁶ Gill realised, however, that many of the heresies which Scripture refutes have, nonetheless, their origin in Scripture. For example, a Sabellian, a Unitarian, and a Trinitarian could all quote with equal piety the verse, "I and the Father are one," yet each would have in mind a different interpretation of the text. How then is such error to be uprooted? In all such cases, Gill advised:

The Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture, or the Spirit of God therein; nor are the church or its pastors, nor councils, and popes, the infallible interpreters thereof; there is a private interpretation of Scripture, which every Christian may make, according to his ability and light; and there is a public one, by the preacher of the word; but both are subject to, and to be determined by the Scripture itself, which is the only certain and infallible rule of faith and practice.⁵⁷

⁵⁶Body I, p. 29.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 52.

No doctrine proposed by man should be accepted until it has been tried, proved, and judged by the Bible, and it is the grave responsibility of the theologian to discern the true from the false by submitting every doctrine to the test of God's Holy Word.

A Preliminary Statement. The most succinct and straightforward statement of Gill's theological position was formulated by him very early in his career. The congregation at Horsly-down had adopted a Church Covenant during the ministry of Benjamin Keach which his people had been accustomed to reading together before each Communion Service. This custom was continued during Gill's ministry, but eventually, he composed another "Declaration of Faith" and suggested that it might be used in place of the one written by his predecessor.⁵⁸ Dr. McGlothlin, in his Baptist Confessions of Faith, declares that "in 1764 Doctor John Gill's Church, in London, published their Confession in twelve articles. It is rigidly Calvinistic."⁵⁹ Actually, this Confession was written much earlier than McGlothlin seems to realise. The entry of the Horsly-down Church Record Book, dated 1729, reads as follows:

agreed yt a Declaration of ye faith & practice of the church be drawn up by Bro. Gill to be read & assented to by members at their admission,

⁵⁸Rippon, p. 14.

⁵⁹McGlothlin, p. 290.

instead of yt which was formerly called ye Church Covenant.⁶⁰

On March 25 of that same year, the Declaration of Faith and Practice was accepted by the congregation. This is an exceedingly valuable document in that it affords such a clear picture of Gill's doctrinal convictions while he was yet a young man and still in the first years of his ministry. The Confession, however, is a product of Gill's maturity; throughout his ministry he regarded this statement as the norm of his belief, and he seldom, if ever, deviated from it. Because of this fact, it is important that the Confession be incorporated here in its entirety:

A Declaration of the Faith and Practice of the Church of Christ at Horsly-down under the Pastoral Care of the Reverend John Gill.

Having been enabled, through divine grace, to give up ourselves to the Lord, and likewise to one another by the will of God; we account it a duty incumbent upon us to make a declaration of our faith and practice, to the honour of Christ, and the glory of his name; knowing, that as with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, so with the mouth confession is made unto salvation -- our declaration is as follows:

I. We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the word of God, and the only rule of faith and practice.

II. We believe that there is but one only living and true God; that there are three Persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, who are equal in nature, power, and glory; and that the Son and the Holy Ghost are as truly and properly God as the Father.

⁶⁰Church Record Book, 1729.

III. We believe that, before the world began, God did elect a certain number of men unto everlasting salvation, and that, in pursuance of this gracious design, he did contrive and make a covenant of grace and peace with his Son Jesus Christ, on behalf of those persons, wherein a Saviour was appointed, and all spiritual blessings provided for them; as also that their persons, with all their grace and glory, were put into the hands of Christ, and made his care and charge.

IV. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, being set up from everlasting as the Mediator of the new covenant, and he, having engaged to be the surety of his people, did, in the fulness of time, really assume human nature, in which nature he really suffered and died as their substitute, in their room and stead, whereby he made all that satisfaction for their sins, which the law and justice of God could require, as well as made way for all those blessings, which are needful for them both for time and eternity.

V. We believe that eternal redemption which Christ has obtained, by the shedding of his blood, is special and particular, that is to say, that it was only intentionally designed for the elect of God, and sheep of Christ, who only share the special and peculiar blessings of it.

VI. We believe that justification of God's elect is only by the righteousness of Christ imputed to them without any consideration of any works of righteousness done by them; and that the full and free pardon of all their sins and transgressions, past, present, and to come, is only through the blood of Christ, according to the riches of his grace.

VII. We believe that all those who are chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and sanctified by the Spirit, shall certainly and finally persevere, so that not one of them shall ever perish, but shall have everlasting life.

VIII. We believe that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust; and that Christ will come a second time to judge both quick and dead, when he will take vengeance on the wicked, and introduce his own people into his kingdom and glory, where they shall be ever with him.

IX. We believe that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of Christ, to be continued until his second

coming; and that the former is absolutely requisite to the latter; that is to say, that those only are to be admitted into the communion of the church, and to participate of all ordinances in it, who upon profession of their faith, have been baptized by immersion, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

XI. We also believe that singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, vocally, is an ordinance of the Gospel to be performed by believers; but that every one ought to be left to their liberty in using it.

Now all, and each of these doctrines and ordinances, we look upon ourselves under the greatest obligation to embrace, maintain, and defend; believing it to be our duty to stand fast, in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel...⁶¹

After the Declaration was formally accepted, Gill inscribed it with his own hand in the Church Record Book, the minutes of which he kept himself for over thirty years. This book is now in the possession of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, which is the contemporary continuation of Gill's congregation. Charles H. Spurgeon, who was a much later minister of the church, reverted to the Confession by Keach which he reprinted in The Metropolitan Tabernacle: Its History and Work in 1876. Gill's Declaration did not find a place in that volume.⁶²

A Polemical Approach. A brief essay, entitled Dr. Gill's Confession of 1729, appeared in the 1928-29 volume of The Baptist Quarterly, in which the author came to the

⁶¹Church Record Book. See Appendix A.

⁶²Spurgeon, p. 36.

following surprising conclusion:

The Confession lacks something that is found in the New Testament, and, if Gill were living today, there is little doubt that, with a spirit of freedom, like to that he exercised two hundred years ago, he would refuse to be bound by his own creedal expression.⁶³

This statement is far from the truth. Gill evidenced very little of that "spirit of freedom" spoken of here, and it is exceedingly doubtful whether he would have ever changed his creedal expression. Quite to the contrary, he was bound to it. Once having arrived at his doctrinal position, Gill spent the rest of his life upholding and defending it. It is true that he later altered several sections of it by the insertion of additional phrases, but in every case, this was done to make his position more explicit and never to register a change of opinion. He was vigilant in protecting his theological viewpoint, and he was always ready to pounce upon any opponent whose theology differed from his own. He held on to his tenets of faith with a bulldog tenacity, and he readily growled at anyone who threatened to take them from him. Gill was by nature a polemical writer. He wholeheartedly participated in the polemical writing which was the fashion of his age, and it was not infrequently accompanied by bitter asperity. His skill in such controversies was recognized by both his colleagues and congregation. His first such writing was a little

⁶³Seymour Price, "Dr. Gill's Confession of 1729"; The Baptist Quarterly (1928-29), Vol. 4, p. 371.

pamphlet called The Ancient Mode of Baptism by Immersion, in which he attacked an adversary on the subject of infant baptism.⁶⁴ After this fray, he received the following anonymous poem acclaiming him successor to another popular polemicist whose name was Gale:

Stennett, at first his furious foe did meet,
 Cleanly compell'd him to a swift retreat:
 Next powerful Gale, by mighty blast made fall
 The church's Dagon, the gigantic Wall:
 May you with like success be victor still,
 And give your rude antagonist his fill,
 To see that Gale is yet alive in Gill.⁶⁵

Gill's ability as an argumentative writer brought to him many requests from people who wanted him to enter the arena of battle in their behalf. As has already been noted, both of his early major publications were inspired in this way. His growing reputation for defeating an opponent with his pen won for him the most extravagant praise. One of his admirers compared him to Edward the Black Prince who never fought a battle he did not win and to the Duke of Marlborough who never undertook a siege which he did not carry.⁶⁶ There were some of his contemporaries, however, who had little sympathy for this sort of thing. John Fawcett, a neighboring preacher, who had a profound dislike for theological wrangling and controversial sermons, was once upbraided by his people for not giving them

⁶⁴John Gill, The Ancient Mode of Baptism by Immersion (London, 1727).

⁶⁵Rippon, p. 22.

⁶⁶Sermons and Tracts, p. xi.

"the pure John Gill"; to which he replied:

To be brief, my dear friends, you may say what
you will,
I'll ne'er be confined to read nothing but Gill!⁶⁷

Although it is no doubt true that some of the controversies in which Gill engaged were unfortunate and often were productive of little more than bad feelings, it was, nonetheless, this type of endeavor which helped him to formulate more clearly his theological system. Indeed, it may be said that Gill had a polemical approach to theology. It was only after a long career of controversial writing that he was finally able to author his monumental Body of Divinity. Undoubtedly, the finer points of his thought had been sharpened and fitted together in the wars of words of the preceding years. From the very first days of his ministry, Gill resolved never to put off his armor until he put on his shroud. At the time of his death, one of Gill's friends looked back over his long life and said, "Our young divine, like David, when a stripling in nature, went out to fight the Lord's battles -- in the name of the Lord, he did valiantly."⁶⁸

⁶⁷Underwood, p. 173.

⁶⁸Benjamin Wallin, The Address at the Interment of Gill (London, 1852), p. 37. See Sacred Remains, ed. by J. A. Jones.

CHAPTER III

CONVICTION AND CONTROVERSY

The early part of the eighteenth century was a period of controversies of all kinds, many of which were over matters of religion. Theological disputes troubled the minds of all conscientious ministers and laymen, for this was a time when even the most sacred Christian doctrines were questioned, denied, and defended. Not one of these religious controversies escaped the attention of John Gill. He was remarkably alive to all of the cross-currents of theological thought around him, and the wide range of his polemical writings echoed the ideas of many of his contemporaries. At one point or another, he touched upon nearly all of the major theological issues of his day: the Trinitarian Controversy, the Deistic threat, and the dialectical tension between Calvinism, Antinomianism, and Arminianism.

I. DENIAL OF ANTINOMIANISM

Gill has been described by many of his contemporaries as an Antinomian. This was a label which he strongly resented and vigorously denied. No other accusation ever

aroused in him a more immediate disavowal or evoked a more vigorous response. Antinomianism was a charge which he could never let pass without notice; he knew its danger, and he vigilantly guarded against it.

Gill had good cause to fear Antinomianism. Invariably, the more extreme forms of Calvinist theology came perilously close to the Antinomian position. Antinomianism may be defined as the belief that the moral law is not binding on Christians who are "under grace," or, as John Wesley defined it, the doctrine that "makes void the law through faith."¹ It is directed toward the destruction of the moral law of the Old Testament in the interest of the new freedom found in Christ and is witnessed to by the testimony of the Spirit.² It is a doctrine which has found fertile soil among those whose fear of works-righteousness is so strong that they fail to emphasize the importance of good works. Such neglect may lead logically to the assumption that any conduct is therefore acceptable. The high Calvinist position is particularly vulnerable: if a man is elected and predestined to salvation, surely no power in heaven or on earth can prevent it, regardless of what kind of life he lives. This line of thought leads straight towards Antinomianism. Gill recognized the threat and strenuously endeavored to divert the direction.

¹Hastings, "Antinomianism", Vol. I, p. 581.

²Ibid.

In so doing, he became acutely conscious of even the slightest insinuation that his theology was tainted with this heresy.

The Lime-Street Lecture Incident. It was scarcely more than a slight insinuation that ignited Gill's controversy with Doctor Abraham Taylor. These two men, along with seven other ministers, were invited to take part in a lectureship which was designed to offset the spread of Deistic ideas by teaching doctrinal truths.³ After the lectures were delivered, arrangements were made to have them printed, but before Gill and Taylor would submit their manuscripts to the press, they wanted to read their sermons to each other in private in order to give mutual help for the improvement of their papers. When Taylor read his lecture, Gill was pleased to discover that apparently he had struck out several objectionable statements which Gill had considered unfair to his own theological viewpoint and suggestive of Antinomianism, but since they were not read, Gill kept silent. Much to his alarm, however, the published volume disclosed that the objectionable passages from Taylor's paper had been printed after all! Now Gill felt duty-bound to speak out against him, despite their friendship.

³The lectures were delivered at Lime-street in 1730-31. Gill's subject was The Resurrection of the Dead (London, 1750).

Gill voiced his criticisms of Taylor's lecture in a public letter, entitled The Doctrine of God's Everlasting Love to His Elect, and Their Eternal Union with Christ.⁴ It was primarily an attempt to discredit the following excerpt:

It has been said, that during the times of our civil commotions, that there was little preached up but faith in Christ, and that the duties of morality were little insisted on: it is certain that some ignorant enthusiastic preachers insisted then much on eternal union with Christ, and that sin could do a believer no harm, but all wise and thoughtful men abhorred such immoral conceits.⁵

In effect, Taylor was raising two questions: first, does not the doctrine of eternal union with Christ make morality superfluous? and second, in what sense are good works essential to salvation?

In answer to the first question, Gill insisted that the doctrine of eternal union had never been preached to the extent Taylor implied and that it certainly had never been preached to the exclusion of upholding moral duties. This was not to say that the doctrine is unimportant. Indeed, its importance is attested by all of the "imminent divines,"⁶ men whose witness Gill summoned to substantiate his claim. Historically speaking, however, the doctrine

⁴John Gill, The Doctrine of God's Everlasting Love to His Elect, and Their Eternal Union with Christ (London, 1752), 3rd ed. (Hereafter called Everlasting Love).

⁵Abraham Taylor, The Insufficiency of Natural Religion (Boston, 1755), p. 7.

⁶Such as the Dutch Divines, Hoornebeck and Witsius.

of eternal union was never intended to be connected with the belief that the elect have an immunity from the harm of sin. It would be more correct to say that Christ united Himself with the elect and not only implanted grace in them to perform good works, but also ordained that they should persist in them until the end.

Gill saw that his real point at issue with Taylor was over the time and manner of this union with Christ. When does it take place, and what is done to achieve it? Is it an eternal act of God, or is it a relationship entered into in time through a response of faith and good works by man? It is generally said that men are not united to Christ until they believe, but "why must this union be pieced up with faith on our part?" asked Gill. Further:

This smells so prodigious rank of self, that one may justly suspect something rotten and nauseous lies at the bottom of it. I shall therefore undertake to prove, that the bond of union of God's elect to Christ, is neither the Spirit on Christ's part, nor faith on their part.⁷

The idea that the elect first receive the Spirit of Christ and are then, by the work of the Spirit, united to Him, is a confusion of an effect with its cause. The union with Christ comes first, and by virtue of this union, the elect receive His Spirit. The invasion of the Spirit

⁷Everlasting Love, pp. 26-27

into the hearts of God's people is a consequence of a previous joining to His Person. This antecedent union also precedes faith, for if, on the one hand, it is held that men are joined to Christ by the principle of infused faith, then the union is a gift of grace and an operation of God. On the other hand, if it be held that men are united to Christ by their own faith, then they are joined in Him by a human work.⁸ Gill saw no half-way meeting place between God and man. Either the unification was all the act of God or all the act of man; he had no thought of God's offering the possibility of this union in order for man to appropriate it. Nonetheless, he said that it is in a sense true to speak of this union as being one of "mutual love" so long as it is recognized that Christ's love to man (never man's love to Christ) is alone the real binding power. Faith is never a uniting grace; nor does it act as a cementing agent in any of its functions. Faith, rather, is a grace of comm-union. It, indeed, looks to Christ and embraces Christ, but it can no more be said to unite men to Him than a beggar may be said to be united to the person from whom he begs. Just as a man cannot walk unless his body be joined to his head, so a man cannot believe unless he is first fastened to his spiritual Head, Jesus Christ. This fastening love of God which comes before faith effects the following unions:

⁸Ibid., p. 29.

1. an election union, by which chosen persons are considered in Christ from the foundation of the world.
2. a legal union, in which the elect and Christ are one as surety and debtor.
3. a federal union, in which Christ and the elect are considered as one with Christ as the Head and the elect as members.
4. a natural union, manifested in time when Christ assumed the same nature as all mankind.
5. a representative union, in which Christ represents the elect as their Head in the covenant of grace, and by which the elect are said to be crucified with Him.⁹

Although each of these unions was executed in eternity, those who are among the elect and who are united to Christ become informed of this fact only through the gift of faith. Faith, then, is simply the manifestation of an eternal secret. If a man believes, this is his certain evidence that he has been chosen by God, but if he has not been chosen, faith is impossible. Nothing a man can do will ever alter the eternal choice; no number of good works can change his status.

Thus far Gill's argument seemed to be playing right into the hands of those who accused him of Antinomianism. One of Taylor's charges was that some preachers were so obsessed by the notion of God's eternal love for His elect that they not only claimed God sees no sin in His people but also that He saves them regardless of their moral con-

⁹Ibid., pp. 34-38.

duct. Having affirmed the doctrine of eternal union, Gill proceeded to defend it against abuse. "It does not follow," he said, "that because God loves and delights in His elect, while in a state of nature, that He loves and delights in their sins."¹⁰ He loves their persons, but He hates their sins. The phrase, "God sees no sin in his people," has been misused. It does not mean that there is no sin in believers, nor does it imply any impeachment of God's omniscience. Neither does the statement mean that God takes no notice of sin, nor resents sin. It means that God sees the sins of His people with an eye of love instead of wrath, since the satisfaction required for their penalty was covered by Christ on the Cross. Because Christ has already secured the salvation of the elect, it is a pernicious displacement of His righteousness to suggest the necessity of something further on the part of man. In what way can good works ever be considered necessary to salvation unless as a means to procure it? In the first place, God has a right to all man's obedience prior to his performance of it. Further, any good work man does is done by the grace of God given to him. If good works are required for salvation, surely Christ died in vain!

Gill hastily added that, though good works are emphatically not necessary to salvation, they are, nonetheless, still in some sense essential. They are required

¹⁰Ibid., p. 56

because God has commanded them. They are needed to evidence the truth of man's faith to the world. They are also important for the protection of neighbors who are injured by evil works but strengthened by good ones. Finally, they serve to engender good feelings among the enemies of religion. Good works are certainly "not trifling and indifferent things" or "useless, unnecessary, and insignificant"; but it is a "matter of faith, and what ought to be abode by, that good works are not necessary to salvation."¹¹

Instead of silencing the accusation of Antinomianism, Gill's public letter to Taylor accentuated it. Also, another pamphlet called The Doctrine of Justification,¹² which Gill had published about the same time, substantiated the charge. In this publication, Gill affirmed that the doctrine of eternal union with Christ was inseparably connected to the doctrine of eternal justification. He explained that the phrase "justification by faith" does not refer to the faith of man, for such faith would be justification by works. Faith certainly apprehends Christ, but it must clearly be seen that "we are said to be justified by faith, yet faith is never said to justify us."¹³ "The reason why we are justified is not because we have faith, but the reason why

¹¹Ibid., p. 76.

¹²John Gill, The Doctrine of Justification (London, 1756), 4th ed.

¹³Ibid., p. 21.

we have faith is because we are justified."¹⁴

Warnings to Students of Divinity. Six years after the Lime-street Lectures, Taylor resumed the controversy by replying to Gill indirectly through an address delivered to a group of young students in divinity.¹⁵ His message was essentially one of warnings against theological doctrines which "weaken men's obligations to duty and holiness and lead to gross Antinomianism."¹⁶ It was also an attempt to make clear the fact that many men who believed in free grace could in no way be identified with the men who preached the extreme high Calvinist doctrines. Taylor's own theology may be summarized succinctly as follows: that persons are not justified by works without faith, nor by faith without works, but by faith accompanied with and productive of good works. Unfortunately, instead of meeting his theological opponents on theological grounds, Taylor simply dismissed them with a series of acrimonious insults. He called Simon of Samaria (whom he accredited with originating the idea that good works are not necessary to salvation) the "vilest and lewdest heretic that ever infested the Christian Church," and present day theologians who accepted his doctrines were referred to as "botchers of divinity"

¹⁴Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁵Abraham Taylor, An Address to Young Students in Divinity (London, 1739).

¹⁶Ibid., pp. iii-iv.

with only "a little smattering of learning" who "have run out to preach as soon as they have fancied they had the inward call."¹⁷

Taylor's slanderous attack stirred Gill to retort in a similar vein. He published another small treatise concerning The Necessity of Good Works to Salvation¹⁸ in which he explained all over again the position he had previously stated, but this time he punctuated his arguments with the intemperate language of self-vindication. Later, Gill acknowledged that he had "said some things in the heat of controversy, which, though they were consistent with truth, were not agreeable to his natural inclination."¹⁹ Toward the termination of the dispute, both men probably lamented that it had ever taken place, for the whole affair had left an unfavorable impression upon the public mind.

Exoneration of Doctor Crisp. The controversy with Doctor Abraham Taylor by no means cleared Gill of the charge of Antinomianism. It was a stigma which was associated with his name throughout his entire ministry. Perhaps one reason for this was Gill's persistent refusal to recognize Antinomianism in the writings of Doctor Tobias Crisp,²⁰ a man who was generally regarded by most of Gill's contemporaries

¹⁷Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁸John Gill, The Necessity of Good Works to Salvation (London, 1739).

¹⁹Rippon, p. 36.

²⁰Tobias Crisp, Christ Alone Exalted ... Being the Complete Works of Tobias Crisp (London, 1690).

as having introduced Antinomianism into England.²¹ Crisp's name appeared frequently in the Taylor-Gill disputes, but Gill was either totally blind to his heresy or else saw so clearly where Crisp had erred that he determined to exonerate him. For example, where Crisp said that sin could do a believer no harm, Gill interpreted the statement to mean simply that all things ultimately work together for good. Where Crisp commented that believers need not be afraid to commit sin, Gill explained that what he really meant was that believers need not be afraid of sins committed. And when Crisp taught that believers were immune to the consequences of sin, Gill insisted that he was referring to the penal effect of eternal punishment from which believers have been freed already by Christ.²² In his letter to Taylor in 1732, Gill did make this one concession: "Doctor Crisp, I verily believe," he said, "used these expressions in a sound sense and with good design; not to encourage persons to sin, but to relieve and comfort the minds of believers distressed with sin. Yet, I must confess, I do not like the expressions, but am of opinion they ought to be disused."²³ Nevertheless, twenty-three years later Gill did himself irreparable harm by editing and re-publishing Doctor Crisp's Works.²⁴

²¹C. E. Whiting, Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution (The MacMillan Co., London, 1931), p. 267.

²²Everlasting Love, pp. 12-14.

²³Ibid., p. 14.

²⁴Crisp, Christ Alone Exalted (London, 1791), 4th ed.

After reading this volume, which is fully annotated by Gill, one gets the unmistakable impression that he leaned over backwards in an impossible attempt to exonerate the man, and in so doing, he further entrenched the charge of Antinomianism against himself. Yet, surely, it is an unfair judgment to call a man like Gill an Antinomian, for his life was blameless; and, though he preached that Christ had delivered the elect from the curse of the law, he always insisted that Christ had not abrogated it as a standard for living. It is easy to see, however, how the teaching of a theologian like Gill might be misinterpreted by uneducated hearers and how his theology might be used to justify Antinomianism in practice.

II. TREATISE ON THE TRINITY

The Trinitarian Controversy, which erupted within the Established Church in the seventeenth century, engulfed the Non-Conformist Churches in the eighteenth. The issue was at white heat when Gill began his ministry, and it had not completely cooled when he retired. The doctrine of the Trinity could scarcely escape questioning in an Age of Reason, and a preacher such as John Gill could hardly be expected to keep out of the dispute. Characteristically, he published a treatise in defense of the doctrine early in his career, and he continued to be concerned with this subject as long as he lived.

The Salter's Hall Conference. An indication of the progress of this controversy within Baptist Churches is seen in the account of the Presbyterian-sponsored Salter's Hall Conference which met in 1719, in which a large number of Baptist ministers participated.²⁵ This Conference was called in reaction to a bold assertion of Arianism by two Presbyterian preachers, and it was hoped that all persons who attended the Conference would subscribe to a strong Trinitarian statement and thus secure the orthodox position. Finally, the group agreed to the general truth that "there is but one living and true God, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are that one God,"²⁶ but when the ministers were asked to sign, many refused. Fourteen out of the sixteen Particular Baptists present willingly signed, but of the fifteen General Baptists, fourteen would not.²⁷ In all fairness, it should be said that some of these objected not so much to the formula of faith as they did to the principle of freedom involved, but nonetheless, the figures are significant, for it is estimated that by 1750 the majority of General Baptists had become Unitarian in belief.²⁸ As Gill watched this heresy worm its way into the General Baptist camp,

²⁵E. M. Wilbur, A History of Unitarianism (Harvard Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1952), pp. 258-63.

²⁶C. J. Abbey and J. H. Overton, The English Church in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1887), p. 215.

²⁷Ivimey III, pp. 160-63.

²⁸Vedder, p. 167.

he resolved to prevent a similar catastrophe among the Particular group.

The Orthodox Position. Gill's Treatise on the Doctrine of the Trinity²⁹ was not levelled against any one person but was directed in a general way against a whole cluster of heresies which have corrupted the orthodox formula. He simply stated his own understanding of the dogma and then endeavored to underwrite it with a generous documentation of texts. He explained in the usual Trinitarian vocabulary that there is but one divine essence, undivided, and common to the Father, Son, and Spirit, and therefore, one God; but there are different modes of subsisting in it, which are called Persons. The whole divine essence is present in each of these Persons, and neither precedes the other in order of time or causality. Gill affirmed this to be the fundamental article of revealed religion; it is admittedly somewhat mysterious and must be received in faith, but it is, nevertheless, well grounded and attested in Scripture. He proceeded to demonstrate this by quoting verses which prove, first, that there is a unity of the divine essence; then, that there is a plurality in the Godhead; and finally, that there is a Trinity of Persons, each of which has a distinct personality.

Gill's argumentation would be almost totally invalid

²⁹John Gill, Treatise on the Doctrine of the Trinity (London, 1752), 2nd ed. (First published 1731.).

to one who had not first accepted his primary premise concerning the inerrancy and supreme authority of the Bible. For example, he attached great weight to the plural usages of the Hebrew word Elohim in the Old Testament as proof of the plurality in the Godhead, and, as an afterthought, he added that surely Moses who was so concerned about heathen gods could never have slipped up here.³⁰ It is interesting to note that in this particular case Gill appealed to reason in the interpretation of Scripture instead of simply seeking Scriptural support for a traditional dogma. More often, he merely quoted Scripture and stopped there, such as citing "This is My Beloved Son" to establish the Sonship of Christ.³¹ He singled out John 14:16 as his sedes doctrinae for conclusive evidence of the "three-in-one" and their distinctive personal attributes: "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter."³² In one place, he pointed out that the Most High God is sometimes referred to as Jehovah, and from this he reasoned, "If therefore I prove that Jesus Christ is called Jehovah, or that this name is given to Him, I prove Him to be the Most High God." ("Upon the whole, the argument ... stands firm and unshaken").³³ Gill seldom overstepped the boundaries of Scripture proof or pushed the argument into the dark recesses of metaphysical speculation. He did make use of such ancient

³⁰Ibid., pp. 22-26.

³¹Ibid., p. 120

³²Ibid., p. 65.

³³Ibid., 108.

analogies as the ray of light, which proceeds from the sun as a part of it, and yet without any division or diminution from it, though consubstantial with it.

Gill seemed to find it easier to assert what he did not believe about the Trinity than to explain what he did believe. The Trinity is not to be understood in the Arian sense, that there is one supreme God and two subordinates; nor in the Sabellian sense, that God is but one Person; nor in the Socinian sense, that Christ was not God by nature but by office or adoption; nor the Tritheistic sense, that there are three essences. All Christians, however, are in a sense Unitarians. They believe firmly in a trinity of distinct Persons in one God, who is but one in His essence. Gill was very careful to catalogue all of the Trinitarian heresies lest he leave himself open on any side. He also expressed deepest concern that each of these errors be discredited, for he seemed fully cognizant of the fact that every doctrine of the Christian Faith -- from the Creation to the Ascension -- hinges upon the acceptance of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity.

Concerning the Sonship of Christ. One aspect of the doctrine which Gill wrestled with and never succeeded in explaining to his own satisfaction was that of the proper Sonship of Christ. He was unable to reconcile his belief

in the filiation of Christ with the paradoxical corrolary conviction concerning Christ's eternal, equal, and co-existent reign with the Father. Near the end of his ministry, he re-published his original Treatise on the Doctrine of the Trinity, and in the new edition he added a few further comments on this subject in an attempt to propound the paradox with more convincing clarity. He wrote:

My treatise on the Trinity was written nearly forty years ago, and when I was a young man. And had I now departed from some words and phrases, I then used, it need not be wondered at. But so far from it, that upon late revisal of the piece I see no reason to retract anything I have written, either as to the sense or expressions; save only, in a passage or two of Scripture, which then did not stand so clear in my mind, of proofs of the eternal generation of the Son of God.³⁴

Also, in the latter years of his life, Gill finished a pamphlet which he called, A Dissertation Concerning the Eternal Sonship of Christ, and this was published posthumously.³⁵ In this he proposed to show how the distinction of Persons in the Deity depended upon the generation of the Son and how this idea might be retained even though it cannot be granted that the Father was in any way pre-existent to the Son. He approached the problem with the suggestion that, though the divine essence could never have been begotten,

³⁴Body I, p. 249.

³⁵John Gill, A Dissertation Concerning the Eternal Sonship of Christ (London 1773); See Sermons and Tracts, Vol. II.

the divine Person in that essence could have been begotten; but if this were the case, can one truly say that the personal Christ existed before His entrance into history? To answer this question, Gill resorted to another well worn analogy: the reason why Christ is called the Word. Just as the mental word is the birth of the mind, begotten of it intellectually and immaterially, yet without passion or motion; and is the very image and representation of the mind and the same nature of it, yet something distinct from it; so is Christ the begotten of the Father, the express image of His Person, of the same nature with Him, and yet distinct from Him. Gill realized that the analogy was inadequate for his purpose, but he left it as it stands, and in effect, he circumvented the whole issue when he concluded:

There being nothing in the divine nature but what is eternal, then this generation must be eternal generation -- a phrase which is no more contradictory than a Trinity in unity or a Trinity of Persons in one God.³⁶

This, to say the least, was a safe enough statement! For lack of further argument, and as if in desperation, Gill finally appealed to the authority of tradition. He said:

This article concerning the Sonship of Christ, and the doctrine of the Trinity, has been maintained by all sound Divines and evangelical

³⁶Ibid., p. 354.

churches, from the Reformation to the present time, as appears by their writings and harmony of confessions. So that upon the whole it is clear the church of God has been in the possession of this doctrine of the eternal generation and Sonship of Christ from the beginning of Christianity to the present age, almost eighteen hundred years.³⁷

By appealing to tradition, Gill parted company with the tradition of his own Baptist denomination. Baptists always have maintained that any such evidence is not only secondary to Scripture but also that it is inconclusive and often unreliable; and therefore, not very strong in an argumentative discourse.

A Confessional Statement. Gill's inability to illuminate this doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ did not prevent his being impatient with anyone who denied it. Each member of his congregation was expected to know just where he stood on this matter, and anyone who doubted was dealt with accordingly. The Church Record Book tells of one James Harmon who was ejected from the membership in 1768 because "he declared he had been long at enmity with the Doctrine of the Eternal Sonship of Christ by the Generation of the Father."³⁸ It is not surprising, in the light of this, that in the same year the church voted to add the following paragraph to its Declaration of Faith:

³⁷Ibid., pp. 561-62.

³⁸Church Record Book.

These three Divine Persons are distinguished from each other by peculiar relative properties; the distinguishing character and relative property of the First Person is begetting, he has begotten a Son of the same nature with Him, of whom is the express image of His Person and therefore He is with great propriety called the Father. The distinguishing character and relative property of the Second Person is that He is begotten and He is called the only begotten of the Father and His own proper Son, not as a son by creation as angels and men are; nor by adoption as saints are, nor by office as civil magistrates are, but by nature by the Father's eternal generation of Him in the divine nature and therefore He is truly called the Son; the distinguishing character and relative property of the Third Person is to be breathed by the Father and the Son and so proceeds from both and is very properly called the Spirit or breath of both these three distinct Persons we profess to reverence, love, and worship as the One True God.³⁹

III. THE SUPRALAPSARIAN SCHEME

Calvinist theologians have not been unanimous in their choice between Supralapsarianism and Sublapsarianism. These are the two names given to opposing schools of thought about the sequence of decrees devised by God for

³⁹Church Record Book, 1768. Also, at the same time, the following further additions were made in the Declaration of Faith. In Article IV, after the phrase, "really assume human nature," insert "and not before, neither in whole nor in part; his human soul, being a creature, existed not from eternity, but was created and formed in his body by him that forms the spirit of man within him, when that was conceived in the womb of the virgin; and so his human nature consists of a true body and a reasonable soul; both which, together, and at once, the Son of God assumed into union with his divine Person, when made of a woman, and not before." After the phrase, "performed by believers," in Article X, add, "as to time, place, and manner."

the salvation of His elect. Those who adhere to the Supralapsarian scheme believe that God, in order to demonstrate His grace and justice, selected from the "pure mass" of creatable men (i.e. from men to be created) a certain portion to be set apart for eternal blessedness and another portion to be set apart for eternal misery, and that this selection was made antecedently to any consideration of the Fall or of their sin. Those who adhere to the Sublapsarian scheme also believe that God decreed this division between the elect and the damned, but they insist that God regarded mankind as already fallen when He made the selection. The distinction between these two views is one of the finer points of theology, the discussion of which has been a favorite indoor sport among certain Calvinist theologians and an issue over which some of them could disagree and continue to be friends.

Appraisal of the Doctrine. Even John Gill had no settled and final feelings about this matter, but on one occasion he made a fierce attack against a rather inept opponent who had dared to ridicule the Supralapsarians. The dispute was provoked by an anonymous pamphlet called, Some Doctrines in the Supralapsarian Scheme Impartially Examined⁴⁰ (later revealed to have been written by a man

⁴⁰ Job Burt, Some Doctrines in the Supralapsarian Scheme Impartially Examined (London, 1735).

from Warwick named Job Burt), and this was answered by Gill in another pamphlet called, Truth Defended.⁴¹ Both men muddled the issue by dragging much extraneous material into the controversy. Only two arguments seem worthy of consideration here.⁴²

Burt probed the heart of the problem when he asserted that the Supralapsarian scheme embodies a logical inconsistency. He could not understand how God, whose foreknowledge enables Him to see the end of man, can logically overlook the Fall of man. According to the Supralapsarians, God's primary purpose in ordering the world was to glorify Himself. He decided that this could best be done by devising a series of decrees which would destine some men to salvation and others to condemnation and would, thus, magnify both His goodness and His justice at the same time. Therefore, God's primary act was the selection of the blessed and the damned, but once this was done, He needed to work out a scheme which would evolve toward the fulfillment of this foreordained end. The scheme He chose accounts for all the lesser decrees: the Creation, the Fall, sin and Redemption. Thus, in order of thought, the decrees of election and probation even precede the decrees which made possible man's permission to sin!

⁴¹John Gill, Truth Defended, (London, 1736).

⁴²The theological implications of these schools of thought will be considered more thoroughly in subsequent chapters.

To Job Burt this seemed to be a clear case of putting the cart before the horse. How could God's wrath and condemnation precede man's inability to sin? Furthermore, this raised a second objection concerning the character of God. Surely no moral God would exercise wrath toward a human being unless he were in some way deserving of that wrath, and certainly a consideration of sin must necessarily come before any sentence of condemnation. Can it be said that God ordained sin as a means to the destruction of those already foreordained to wrath? And if God chose men to salvation before seeing them in sin, how does the decree of election manifest His infinite mercy?⁴³

In Gill's response to Burt, he did more wrangling than reasoning. He seemed to be more concerned to ridicule Burt and to stand up for his Supralapsarian friends than he did to tackle the criticisms at hand. He rebuked Burt for his rude reference to Joseph Hussey and Doctor Crisp whose "memory will be dear and precious to the saints when this writer and his pamphlet will be remembered no more,"⁴⁴ and he repeatedly quoted "that great Supralapsarian," Doctor Twisse.⁴⁵ As for Job Burt, he was an "ignorant wretch."⁴⁶

⁴³Burt, p. 19.

⁴⁴Truth Defended, p. 40.

⁴⁵Prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly.

⁴⁶Truth Defended, pp. 78-79.

In answering the argument, Gill was unable to see any reason why the Fall or man's sin should have any bearing on the decree of election and reprobation. After all, election is purely a work of grace springing from the sovereign good pleasure of God and is a decree which by no means presupposes that men are sinners and miserable. Nor is reprobation a strike against God's justice, for this too springs from His sovereign will, and therefore, cannot be unjust. Even so, the elect may be called "vessels of mercy" and the condemned may be called "vessels of wrath," since through such means, they are ultimately brought to glory or to torment, their foreordained end.⁴⁷

A Combination Plan. Actually, Gill did not seem to attach too much importance to the distinction between the Supralapsarians and Sublapsarians. His main concern was to establish the fact that when God chose men, He considered them in an equal state, regardless of whether He considered them as fallen or not yet fallen. One gets the impression that he might have defended one view just as readily as the other and equally resented the ridiculing of either. As the following quotation will indicate, he eventually advocated an acceptance of both schemes, and he suggested that the Supralapsarian plan be known as the "decree of the end" and

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 412.

the Sublapsarian plan, the "decree of the means":

The difference between them lies in the ordering and arranging of the decrees of God; and for my own part, I think both (schemes) may be taken in. That in the decree of the end, the ultimate end (according to the Supralapsarians), the glory of God, for which he does all things, men might be created in the divine mind as creable, not yet created and fallen: and that in the decree of the means (according to the Sublapsarians), which, among other things, takes in the mediation of Christ, and the sanctification of the Spirit; men might be considered as created, fallen, and sinful, which these things imply.⁴⁸

How can both of these views be reconciled? - simply by realizing that it is erroneous to suppose separate acts and decrees in God, or any priority or posteriority in them, for in Him they are but one, though they can never be comprehended so by the finite mind of man.

IV. REPLY TO THE REASONABLE RELIGIONISTS

Of all the controversies which arose in the eighteenth century, none was conducted with greater bitterness than the controversy with the Deists. The Church reacted to the Deistic literature with considerable alarm, for this new school of thought was widely talked about and promised to be influential. Much of the alarm was occasioned by the realization that many clergymen had become captive to Deistic ideas. Strategically located in the organization of the Church, they were in a position to

⁴⁸Body I, p. 270.

tear down its structure from within. While the Deists were trying to prove that their rationalism was not anti-Christian, many orthodox ministers tried to prove that their Christianity was not unreasonable, but in this process of rationalization, some ministers began to talk like Deists and others echoed and re-echoed nearly everything the Deists had to say.

The Birmingham Dialogue Writer. John Gill's participation in the Deistic controversy was confined to fencing with those men who were voicing Deistic ideas from within the Church. The first such encounter was with a minister of Birmingham, Reverend Samuel Bourne, who circulated a pamphlet called, A Dialogue between a Baptist and a Churchman.⁴⁹ He produced this writing (which was first published anonymously "by a Consistent Christian") in order to give vent to his acute disgruntlement about a group of Baptists who had moved into his neighborhood and built a church. The Baptists at whom the pamphlet obviously had been directed felt that the attack had to be answered, and they knew exactly the right person to ask to do it: the Reverend John Gill. He readily obliged at their request, but shortly thereafter, a second installment of the Dialogue appeared, so that Gill was obliged to reply again. The

⁴⁹A Consistent Christian (Samuel Bourne), A Dialogue between a Baptist and a Churchman Part I. (London, 1739).

subject matter of these dialogues encompassed a wide range of topics, but in every issue brought up, the argument revolved around Bourne's insistence that reason is the only foundation for a sound theological system. If Gill had actually taken part in a dialogue with Bourne, it would have unfolded somewhat as follows:

Bourne: The Spirit of God is wise and calm, and the author of nothing but reasonable discourses.⁵⁰ That is why I am a consistent Christian.

Gill: It seems to me that you are a heathen and not a Christian, much less a consistent one. You strongly intimate that you believe in a superior Deity and a subordinate Deity.

Bourne: Would you accuse me of denying the Divinity of Christ only because I deny His supreme Deity and equality with the Father?

Gill: If the Father has given to Christ only some of the divine perfections, then He is imperfectly God, or an imperfect God; and if He has given Him all of the divine perfections, then He must be equal to the Father.⁵¹

Bourne: The supreme God can have nothing given to Him.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 4.

⁵¹John Gill, An Answer to the Birmingham Dialogue Writer Part I (London, 1737), p. 14.

To suppose this is to give up the whole case.

Gill: I believe that Father, Son, and Spirit are the one Most High God.

Bourne: Then how do you reconcile "derived" and "dependent" with God's omnipotence and omniscience? Is this not a glaring contradiction? To tell me that I must believe what I do not understand is to tell me that I must believe what I do not know.

Gill: When a thing is revealed, it may still remain a mystery how it is, but it is no longer a mystery that it is; in the case before us, it is no longer a mystery that the three Persons are one God, but how they are so is a mystery.⁵² Would you set your judgment against the teaching of the Church?

Bourne: All the Protestants did so when they left the Church of Rome. There is no such thing as proper orthodoxy. We ought to treat all who live according to the Gospel as brethren, whatever their differing sentiments may be.⁵³

Gill: As to orthodoxy, I can assure you that Baptists do not make any confessions, catechism, or articles the stan-

⁵²Ibid., p. 23.

⁵³A Consistent Christian (Samuel Bourne), A Dialogue between a Baptist and a Churchman Part II (London, 1739), p. 18.

dards of it, but the Bible only.⁵⁴

Bourne: Then why do you believe in divine election? This doctrine makes God like a father who watches his children drowning and, though he has boats for all, sends out enough to rescue only some.⁵⁵

Gill: The doctrine of election is more merciful than the contrary scheme which makes the salvation of everyone uncertain. At least the doctrine of election guarantees the salvation of some!⁵⁶

Bourne: I suppose that "the elect will be reduced to a few whimsical Baptists -- as if heaven were a region of enthusiasm, error, and bigotry, and the elect a parcel of proud, self-conceited Separatists!"⁵⁷

Gill: You are objecting to the doctrines of the Church of England of which you say you are a member.⁵⁸ Christ's divinity and divine election are both maintained in her Articles.

Bourne: The "church tyranny of inventing and imposing new

⁵⁴An Answer I, p. 9.

⁵⁵Dialogue I, p. 18.

⁵⁶An Answer I, p. 26.

⁵⁷Dialogue I, p. 18.

⁵⁸By this time Bourne had left the Church of England and become a Presbyterian.

articles of faith cannot be treated with too great severity, for this has been the foundation of the worst miseries to mankind."⁵⁹ Must we make no progress in religious knowledge? For example, is there nothing more rational, more agreeable to human reason, than offering Christ for the salvation of all men?

Gill: Ministers of the Gospel are sent to preach to every creature, but this does not mean to offer Christ and His salvation. Ministers are merely to publish peace and pardon as things already obtained by Him.⁶⁰

Bourne: Suppose that there was a town in which there was only one well of fresh water and that the owner of the town sent a messenger to tell everyone that they might come and drink. Would you not call this a kind, gracious offer? But suppose the owner knew that the people were already so weak for lack of water that they could not stir to get it. Would not the invitation then be added cruelty to wretches already in misery?⁶¹

Gill: All of these falsely called "offer texts" of the Bible are only declarations of God's will or predictions of the final outcome of preaching the Gospel in consequence

⁵⁹Dialogue II, pp. 25-26.

⁶⁰John Gill, An Answer to the Birmingham Dialogue Writer Part II (London, 1739), p. 21.

⁶¹Dialogue II, p. 63.

of God's absolute decrees.

Bourne: Those who hold to Calvinist principles may be good men, but they are bad logicians. The thing I dislike about you Particular Baptists is that you lay such great weight on your own "peculiar opinions and practices" and are "so intolerably censorious of and uncharitable towards all" who do not think as you do. I cannot help judging you to be "very degenerate Christians who have departed very far from the wise, the mild, the friendly spirit of the Gospels."⁶²

Gill: You speak with great pretence about a charitable religion, but you "cast firebrands ... and reproachings in a very mean and scandalous manner" against men and doctrines disagreeable to yourself.⁶³

This fabricated dialogue is representative of the material contained in the pamphlets which Bourne and Gill exchanged. Their divergence in thought was rooted in their appeals to two different standards of authority. For Gill, the Bible was the last word and he knew of no higher court of appeal. To him it seemed sheer audacity for anyone to question the sovereign Word of God, even though it be diametrically opposed to logic; but for Bourne, the Bible was always subject to the higher authority of reason. He

⁶²Dialogue I, p. 45.

⁶³An Answer I, p. 4.

asserted straightforwardly that "no Scripture is to be taken in a sense contradictory to reason,"⁶⁴ and he maintained that the Bible is from first to last addressed to man's understanding.

Also, for Bourne, the way a man lived was more important than what he believed. Opinions render no man acceptable to God, he reasoned; "in His eyes there is no orthodoxy but sincerity."⁶⁵ Such sentiment was anathema to Gill and little short of atheism. Gill could consider no man a good man whose doctrine was wrong; indeed, he judged men more by what they believed than by what they did. It was impossible for Gill to argue with a man like Bourne, for he not only denied the authority of his basic weapon, the Bible, but also made light of the importance of doctrine.

The Nature and Fitness of Things. Gill's second encounter with a man imbued with Deistic ideas occurred in 1738 when he read a sermon delivered by Reverend Samuel Chandler to the Societies for the Reformation of Manners. The author of this sermon reflected the whole gamut of Deistic thought. He believed (1) that revealed religion must be subordinate to natural religion, (2) that the Scriptures must be criticised, (3) that everything

⁶⁴Dialogue II, p. 76.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 19

must harmonize with immutable reason, and (4) that the ultimate basis of authority was to be found in the common beliefs of man. The title of Mr. Chandler's address was The Necessary and Immutable Difference between Moral Good and Evil,⁶⁶ and his text was:

Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil;
that put darkness for light and light for darkness;
that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.⁶⁷

He explained that since it is impossible for God to make things true which imply an irreconcilable contradiction to truth, the difference between moral good and evil arises from the very nature of things. Because God understands all things as they really are, He always determines His will according to that immutable and perfect rule of reason which is rooted in the very texture of the universe. The difference between vice and virtue is, therefore, strictly and properly eternal, for it is even prior to and independent of the will of God.⁶⁸ Furthermore, God regulates Himself by this invariable rule and conducts His relationship with His creatures accordingly. The distinction between moral entities is by no means dependent upon the arbitrary will of God, for even God's sovereign will cannot go against the

⁶⁶ Samuel Chandler, The Necessary and Immutable Difference between Moral Good and Evil (London, 1738).

⁶⁷ Isaiah 5:20.

⁶⁸ Chandler, p. 11.

grain of the universe.

To John Gill, this theological vocabulary was not only strange and non-Biblical, but the system it espoused was sheer nonsense. How could anything be prior to the will of God or independent of Him? If this be the case, then man had best fall down and prostrate himself before this new Deity! Either this "nature and fitness of things" is something in God or something apart from God. If it is in Him, then there is no point in abstracting it from Him, but if it is without Him, then there must be two Gods instead of one. A clear case of idolatry!⁶⁹

This raised a further question about man's obligation to God's will. If there is such a thing as a "most perfect rule" existing independently of God, then, surely, any law originating within God must be abrogated in favor of this higher order of things. Said Gill, "This seems something like the stoical fate and necessity, which gives laws to God and to man and equally binds and obliges both."⁷⁰

Chandler also explained in his sermon how men become aware of the difference between moral good and evil. Since this difference is a part of the very nature of things, it

⁶⁹John Gill, The Moral Nature and Fitness of Things Considered (London, 1738), p. 6.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 20.

is readily discernable. Indeed, it is so fundamental and consistent that it manifests itself to all men as clear and unmistakable as the difference between light and darkness. The perceptibility of moral entities is not dependent upon a divine revelation; but they are perceived in the natural world around and are recognizable to all men everywhere. Vice and virtue are as easily discernable as bitter and sweet. Nature has implanted in mankind an abhorrence of evil, and "vice is really a kind of art which requires some length of time to become dextrous or to grow proficient in."⁷¹ Goodness and evil are grounded in good sense and logic; therefore, the commands of God are naturally and antecedently reasonable.

Again Gill pounced upon Chandler's ideas with the assurance of having discovered another wicked heresy. According to this man, sin was no longer a transgression of the will of God but a want of conformity to the nature and fitness of things! How absurd to say that good and evil are as evident as light and darkness! Chandler must be a stranger to both himself and to human nature; otherwise, he would surely know that men are as blindmen. Indeed, their sight is so impaired by the corruption of sin that light and darkness both look the same. If vice and virtue

⁷¹ Chandler, p. 26.

are so easily distinguished, then why do parents bother to give moral training to their children? Why do preachers teach moral precepts? And how can Mr. Chandler account for the different sentiments of men of other ages and nations if these things are all so clear?⁷²

Gill closed in for the kill with what he obviously regarded as the worst accusation of heresy he could make. "I have been traduced as an Antinomian for innocently asserting that the essence of justification lies in the will of God," he said, "but I abhor the thought of setting aside the law of God as a rule of walk and conversation."⁷³ Here is a man, however, who boldly brushes aside the whole law of God in preference to something prior to and more perfect than the will of God! He thus destroys all of God's authority and negates all compulsion of men to obey! "One should think, for the future, that not John Gill, but Samuel Chandler, must be reckoned Antinomian!"⁷⁴ Witness how he declares that fashionable games and diversions are not "strictly criminal in themselves!"⁷⁵ If card playing and stage plays are not objectionable to the society to which he preaches, these things can certainly not be agreeable to the nature and

⁷²Moral Nature and Fitness, p. 29.

⁷³Ibid., p. 40.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Chandler, p. 48.

fitness of things -- "from all such fitnesses the Lord
deliver us!"⁷⁶

⁷⁶Moral Nature and Fitness, p. 44.

CHAPTER IV

ANSWER TO ARMINIANISM

By far the most ambitious polemics ever undertaken by John Gill was in answer to Arminian criticisms of his Calvinist theology. Arminianism was a "heresy" which Gill could scarcely afford to ignore, for it rejected the very doctrines upon which his theological structure stood; even the slightest concession to Arminian thought would have caused the whole edifice to topple. Although Arminianism had been condemned by seventeenth century England, it proved increasingly congenial to the eighteenth century mind, and in certain circles, even achieved the status of orthodoxy. This gradual infiltration of Arminian ideas demanded John Gill's attention.

Arminianism grew out of the same Dutch soil which had produced Gill's Covenant theology. Indeed, it developed as a reaction against certain of the extreme aspects of Calvinism which flourished there. Calvinism's rigid system of eternal decrees had replaced the absolutism of the Roman Church, and Arminianism arose as a protest against this new dogmatism. The protest found its first spokesman in Jacob

Arminius (1560-1609) who maintained that Calvinist theology not only made God responsible for sin and unworthily limited His grace but also left multitudes of men in despair while the elect rested in a false security based upon no ethical principle. The creed of the Arminians was formally set forth in a Remonstrance of five articles addressed to the States General of Holland and West Freiesland in 1610. Their points of belief were stated as follows:

1. that God, by an eternal and unchangeable decree in Christ before the existence of the world, determined to elect from the fallen and sinning human race to everlasting life those, who through his grace, believe in Jesus Christ and persevere in faith and obedience; and on the contrary had resolved to reject the unconverted and unbelievers to everlasting damnation.
2. that, in consequence of this, Christ the Saviour of the world died for all and every man, so that He obtained by the death on the cross, reconciliation and pardon for sin for all men; in such manner, however, that none but the faithful actually enjoyed the same.
3. that man could not obtain saving faith of himself or by the strength of his own free will, but stood in need of God's grace through Christ to be renewed in thought and will.
4. that this grace was the cause of the beginning, progress and completion of man's salvation; inasmuch that none could believe nor persevere in faith without this co-operating grace, and consequently that all good works must be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ. As to the manner of the operation of that grace, however, it is not irresistible.
5. that true believers had sufficient strength through the Divine Grace to fight Satan, sin, the world, their own flesh and get the victory over them; but whether by negligence they might not

apostatize from the true faith, lose the happiness of a good conscience and forfeit that grace needed to be more fully inquired into according to Holy Writ before they proceeded to teach it. (This was amended later to the definite statement that true believers might fall away from God by their own fault and lose faith wholly and finally.)¹

The author of this remarkable document is not definitely known, but it has been attributed to Hugo de Groot (commonly known as Grotius). He was one of Arminius's colleagues who came to London in 1613 and, thus, transplanted Arminianism to England.

I. THE CAUSE OF GOD AND TRUTH

By the time of John Gill, Arminian thought was well rooted in England. Within the Established Church a definite reaction against Calvinism was far underway. The only other people who openly acknowledged Arminian influence were the General Baptists, who, from their very beginning, had adopted Arminian theology and freely referred to themselves as "Arminian Baptists." The Arminianism which developed within the Established Church, however, had lost something of its original genius and positive temper. Ideally understood, Arminianism is a via media system which keeps in proper balance both the human and the divine. It avoids the dual danger of exalting the divine to the suppression of the human on the

¹A. W. Harrison, Arminianism (Duckworth, London, 1937), pp. 49-50.

one hand, and exalting the human to the suppression of the divine on the other. If the scales are tipped in one direction, a simple determinism ensues, whereas, if they are tipped in the other direction, Pelagianism and Socinianism result. Such a fine balance is not found in the theology of the chief exponents of Arminianism during this period. They tempered it with tendencies toward Latitudinarianism and Rationalism until it sounded more negative than constructive and mediating.

Doctor Daniel Whitby, a minister of the Church of England² and a contemporary of John Gill, was regarded in this period as the most able spokesman for the Arminian point of view. He wrote a book entitled, A Discourse on the Five Points,³ a work which was acclaimed a masterpiece on the subject and was judged to be unanswerable. In 1734, the popular reception to this book demanded a reprinting, and many Arminians taunted the Calvinists with the question, "Why don't you answer Doctor Whitby?" Their agitation induced John Gill to re-read the book and inclined him to accept the challenge. That same year he began his reply, which was published in separate sections during the course of the next four years following. The First Part deals with the passages of Scripture used by Doctor Whitby

²Precentor of Salisbury Cathedral; he was eventually excommunicated.

³Daniel Whitby, A Discourse on the Five Points (London, 1735), 2nd ed.

against the Calvinist scheme, and the Second Part considers the Scripture quoted in favor of the Calvinist scheme. Part Three endeavors to confute the rational arguments posed by the Arminians and to vindicate the Calvinist position with the same approach. Part Four consists of a compilation of quotations from the early Church Fathers. These were submitted not to establish the truth or error of either position but to show that the Calvinists as well as the Arminians could make an appeal to antiquity. The completed work, comprising all four sections, was then published in one volume called, The Cause of God and Truth.⁴

The five points of dispute between the Arminians and the Calvinists⁵ were (1) eternal personal election and reprobation, (2) the extent of Christ's redemption, (3) efficacious grace in conversion and sanctification, (4) freedom of the will, and (5) the perseverance of the saints to everlasting felicity. The pro and con arguments for each of these doctrines, as set forth by Whitby and Gill, are considered in the following pages.

1. Concerning Election and Reprobation, Whitby's Argument: Divine election does not mean that God unconditionally appoints any man to salvation. Many of

⁴John Gill, The Cause of God and Truth (London, 1855), A New Edition (Hereafter referred to as Cause).

⁵Sometimes called the Quinquarticular Controversy.

the verses of Scripture which mention election do not refer to particular persons but to nations or churches. For example, the fact that Israel was called an elect people did not mean that every single Israelite would be saved. Wherever the word is used, election signifies that an individual or group of persons have been chosen to enjoy God's grace and have been endowed with the capacity to receive all the privileges and blessings of salvation. Election is a divine decree which includes every man, but it is conditioned by the response a man makes to it. Only those who respond to God in faith and whose belief is joined with holiness will be saved.⁶

The Calvinist doctrine of election would not be so odious if it were not inseparably connected to the doctrine of reprobation. It is impossible to hold to the one decree without affirming the other; they stand or fall together.⁷ How could the God of mercy institute a decree of reprobation? This decretum horrible cannot be excused legitimately as a just punishment for Adam's sin, for there is no justice in a God who would condemn a man's descendants for a sin in which they were neither personally nor responsibly involved. If the imputation of Adam's sin made his posterity sinners, this was an act of God and not of man, for Adam's sin could effect his

⁶Whitby, pp. 35-36.

⁷Ibid., p. 2.

progeny only to the extent which God decreed it. Since it follows, therefore, that God must be the author of sin, then why not say in the first place that God passed this decree upon men as men instead of upon men as sinners?⁸

The decrees of election and reprobation reflect upon the character of God. Such an eternal compact makes God appear exceedingly cruel and is plainly inconsistent with the justice, wisdom and goodness usually attributed to Him. Does it become the sincerity of God to delude men with vain exhortations to faith and penitence if these things do not have some eternal significance for their salvation? Surely He would not call all men to repent and believe if He did not expect them to do so! Would an honest man attempt to engage another in something he knew beforehand was impossible for him to do?⁹ It is certainly unreasonable to suppose that the God of wisdom would use means which He knew could never produce His intended ends. And could the God, whose love of holiness transcends the highest desires of men, have passed a decree which renders the love of holiness in most men a frustrating impossibility?¹⁰ If this be the case, then vice and virtue are but meaningless words, for who could blame a person for

⁸Ibid., p. 80.

⁹Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 73.

doing only what he cannot help?¹¹

Gill's Answer: Election is an immanent, eternal act of God's grace which is effected irrespective of faith and conditioned by nothing done within time. Just as God chose the Hebrew people in preference to all other nations, whom he permitted to walk in their own ways to destruction, so has He chosen certain individuals to be saved and left others to persist in their sins to damnation. God's ultimate purpose in creating man, however, was neither to damn him nor to save him, but to glorify Himself; yet, this glorification is most perfectly manifested through one of the other of these two ways, either salvation or damnation.¹² The decree of election depends solely upon the sovereign will and pleasure of God. According to the Supralapsarians, God made this choice without consideration of sin or the Fall, but in the act of setting apart some men for salvation, He of course passed by others. Both the Supralapsarians and the Sublapsarians agree, however, that God appoints no man to pre-damnation except for sin. Now, it is true that God willed Adam's fall, yet he willed this not by effecting it but by permitting it; therefore, God cannot be called the author of sin.¹³ It is also true that God willed the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, but this was

¹¹Ibid., p. 14.

¹²Cause, p. 72.

¹³Ibid., p. 156.

an act of justice and not a mere arbitrary decree, for Adam was the federal representative of the race, and in him all sinned; and because of that sin, all men deserve condemnation. Thus, it may be said that God appoints no man to condemnation without respect to the evil done by him, though this cannot be given as the cause of the decree but as the reason for the thing decreed.¹⁴ The ultimate cause of the decree rests in God's sovereign pleasure only, for "shall we deny to the King of kings that which is allowed to every earthly prince, to choose his own favorites as he pleases?"¹⁵

The mercy of God should not be compared to the mercy of man, for God's mercy is not moved by the sight of misery as is man's, but is an effect guided by His sovereign will and directed toward whomever He wishes. Human passions should never be ascribed to God. Nor should the will of God be compared to the will of man, for He is not accountable to any of His creatures.¹⁶ Admitting that from man's point of view these doctrines which exclude some men from salvation may appear somewhat cruel, one should not conclude "that the cruelties of God are over all His works ... since some of God's creatures shall be certainly and eternally saved."¹⁷ Surely, the doctrine of conditional election is much less merciful, for it hinges the possibility of salvation upon the mutable will

¹⁴Ibid., p. 152. ¹⁵Ibid., p. 153. ¹⁶Ibid., pp. 151-52.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 13.

of man, an exceedingly impotent and precarious instrument.¹⁸

In order to account for the Scriptural exhortations to penitence and faith (which the opposition maintain are alien to God's wisdom and sincerity if one holds to the decrees of eternal election and reprobation), it is necessary to understand that God's will may be either secret or revealed, purposive or commanding. His secret will is the rule of His own actions, and His revealed will is the duty of His creatures. Often things which are in accord with the secret and purposing will of God differ from His revealed and commanding will. The purpose of God is from eternity; His command is in time; the former is within Himself, the latter put forth from Himself; the former is always fulfilled, the latter seldom fulfilled; the former cannot be resisted, the latter may.¹⁹ For example, it was agreeable to God's secret will for Adam to fall, yet, eating the forbidden fruit was an act of disobedience to His revealed will. It is true, indeed, that God commands all men to repent, "but this is more properly expressive of what is man's duty than of what is the will of God; or in other words, this shows what God has made it man's duty to do and not what He Himself has willed shall be done."²⁰ Men are left inexcusable when they

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 159.

²⁰Ibid., p. 154.

fail to fulfill this duty, but God is by no means obliged to give them the grace to do so. Then are such exhortations contrary to God's wisdom? Certainly not! They evidence His divine authority to command; they make men aware of their weaknesses, and they magnify the riches of His grace. The exhortations to repentance found in Scripture, however, are within man's capacity, but they are totally ineffective for salvation. They are injunctions to legal repentance which refer not to an inward work of grace but to an outward reformation of life -- such as the repentance of the Ninevites -- and is attended with temporal blessings.²¹ This form of repentance must be carefully distinguished from evangelical repentance which is never within the power of a natural man.

Those who maintain that a man's life here on earth conditionally determines a man's destiny hereafter are obviously wrong. If this life were a time of probation, all men ought to be on an equal ground here and have access to the same privileges and opportunities.²² Since this is not the case, God was much more merciful, wise, and just to predestine some men to eternal salvation than to base His choice upon the praise or blameworthiness of the lives they lived here on earth.

²¹Ibid., p. 27.

²²Ibid., p. 7.

2. Concerning the Extent of Christ's Redemption,

Whitby's Argument: Christ died equally for all men. His blood was shed to establish a new covenant which is open to anyone who performs the conditions of it. His death did not procure actual reconciliation or salvation for any man, but it put all men in a position to be reconciled and saved. He did this by removing the guilt, which had obstructed God's Holy Spirit who motivates them to penitence and faith.²³ The work of Christ did not terminate at His death; even now, He continues to intercede for true penitent believers. Although His death on the Cross made salvation possible for all, only those who respond to Him in faith will receive the benefit effected by it.

The Bible makes it clear that the way of salvation is open to all: "as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, so by the righteousness of One, the free-gift came upon all men to justification."²⁴ If Christ "came not into the world to condemn the world," then it must be concluded that He came into the world to save the world.²⁵ Surely such a saying as, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," becomes a mere mockery if no man can comply with this condition and if those to be saved are restricted to a predetermined few.²⁶

²³Whitby, p. 109. ²⁴Romans 5:18. ²⁵John 3:17.

²⁶Acts 16:31.

The fact that some men do not appropriate the salvation designed for them does not mean that God's perfection is in any way less perfect for want of the fulfillment of this divine intention. If one holds to the position that God wills nothing except what He actually executes, then one must logically accept a thoroughgoing determinism and say that God is responsible for every single thing that happens, including every sin that man commits.²⁷ And the fact that some men spurn the possibility of salvation does not mean that Christ's death was to this extent in vain. His death at least placed each man within the potential scope of salvation, and any failure to take advantage of this offer reflects upon the sinful will of man and not upon the gracious intention or perfectibility of God. Although it may be true that the number of persons saved by performing the conditions of the Covenant may be no larger numerically than the number of persons whom God might otherwise have saved by a decree of unconditional eternal election, the conditional doctrinal scheme is much more in keeping with the nature of God.²⁸ It is true that God is indebted to no man, but He is obliged to act suitably to His own attributes. Surely God could never create a man and expect him to believe in Him without preparing a way to make this possible. Does it make sense to think that God, who so willingly provides

²⁷Whitby, p. 197.

²⁸Ibid., p. 187.

bountiful temporal blessings for all His children, could have neglected some of them in preparing for their spiritual well being? To say that God could have provided a way of salvation for all but did not wish to do so, is an insufficient reason and demands an answer to the question, "Why?" Imagine how much a condemned malefactor would be comforted to know that his prince could have saved him but decided not to save him. If all men have sinned, then, surely, all men have an equal right to be considered in God's plan of redemption.

Gill's Answer: Christ did not die for all men but for some men only. These are called his "people," his "sheep," and his "church". That God never intended the death of Christ for the saving of any but His elect is evident from the fact that only the elect are saved.²⁹ If God intended the death of Christ for the salvation of all men and all men are not saved, either He has used insufficient means for His desired end or else He has changed His mind and altered His intention. Each of these alternatives implies an obvious deficiency in divine wisdom.³⁰ God's will can never be frustrated by any thing done by man.

Christ died for the elect alone, and for them the efficacy of His death was absolute. It so satisfied the

²⁹Cause, p. 163.

³⁰Ibid., p. 174.

divine justice that nothing can stand in the way of the elect's being saved, for, if they should be lost, then a double penalty would have been inflicted, once upon Christ and again upon the sinner for whom He died.³¹ No sane man would ever willingly pay the price of redemption for a captive if he knew that the captive's lot would be no better after the price had been paid. Similarly, Christ has not purchased the pardon of any man to no avail!

Many passages of Scripture have been misinterpreted. The Bible clearly states that the Son of Man came "to give His life a ransom for many" -- not all.³² When Christ said, "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me," He meant that some men of all sorts would be drawn unto Him.³³ It is of course true that God is the God of all men as the Ruler of nature and providence, but not as the God of grace in a covenanting way. As for apostolic preaching, this was done to declare the general judgment of God upon all men; there is no instance in Scripture of the apostles making any attempt to persuade all men to whom they preached to believe in Christ. Although they were commissioned to "Go ye therefore into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," this was not meant to be done in any specific sense but to all men indiscriminately, and this "in no way contradicts the particular redemption

³¹Ibid. ³²Ibid., p. 51 (Matthew 20:28). ³³Ibid., p. 34 (John 12:32).

and special salvation of the elect only, it being designed and blessed for the effectual gathering of these to Christ and does become the power of God to their salvation and to theirs only."³⁴

Those who argue that all men to whom the Gospel is revealed must necessarily believe in Christ falsely reason that since the Gospel has been revealed to some men, therefore, Christ died for all men. The weakness of this argument lies in the fact that it proceeds upon the evidence of a partial revelation and moves to the conclusion of a universal redemption! Clearly, the revelation of Christ is not made to all men, and therefore, all men --- such as the Indians -- are not obliged to believe in Christ, much less to believe that He died for them.³⁵ The Covenant of Grace is a sufficient means for salvation, for it includes only those who are interested in it, and they are the elect of God.³⁶ Furthermore, the grace of God is magnified not so much by the numbers of persons on whom it is conferred as it is by the sovereignty of it, the circumstances of the persons interested in it, and the manner in which it is bestowed.³⁷ Consider the following illustration:

The instance of a prince affording an act of grace and indemnity to some rebels, leaving others under

³⁴Ibid., p. 64.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 31-32.

³⁶Ibid., p. 165

³⁷Ibid., p. 55.

condemnation, who would assuredly conceive his grace and favor would be greater were it extended to them also, and not think it the more magnified for being so discrimination, is not to the purpose; for the prince's grace is not to be judged by the conception of such rebels, who are justly left under condemnation; and whatever they think of it, it is certain, that those who are comprehended in the act of grace, look upon their prince's favor to be greater for being so discrimination, seeing that they were equally guilty with such who are left out.³⁸

Even the scheme of conditional election leaves many men under condemnation. If no men were damned, then there would be no distinguishing favor or happiness to any people that the Lord is their God.³⁹

3. Concerning the Efficacy of Grace in Conversion,
Whitby's Argument: Conversion is a process which is initiated and completed by the work of the Holy Spirit. It begins when the Spirit illuminates the mind of man with divine truth and invades his consciousness with an understanding of Scripture. This process is continued as the Spirit repeatedly brings these truths to man's remembrance until he gains strength to resist temptation and encouragement to perform his sacred duties. The Spirit works through the use of man's natural faculties without the aid of any further supernatural assistance.⁴⁰ The ideas thus inspired are physical acts within the brain and are produced without any dependence upon the human will.⁴¹ Yet,

³⁸Ibid. ³⁹Ibid., p. 50. ⁴⁰Whitby, pp. 220-21.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 221-22.

before these ideas can be effective for conversion, man must attend to them and comply with them. He may either wilfully accept them and act accordingly, or he may wilfully resist them and do as he pleases. Man deserves no praise or blame for either the divine ideas or the Satanic ideas that invade his consciousness, but he is held accountable for the response he makes to them. Whenever a man rejects the promptings of the Spirit ("exciting grace"), he cancels the possibility of his conversion, but whoever welcomes these workings of the Spirit has his salvation assured.⁴²

Those who maintain that conversion is wrought by an infrustrable operation of God's grace make vain all of the Biblical commandments and exhortations to wicked men. According to this doctrine, nothing can be required as a prerequisite to conversion, for either the prerequisite is something man can do to assist God's irresistible act, or it is not. If man can do something, then he is not purely passive (as the upholders of this doctrine affirm), but if he can do nothing, then the whole ministry of the Word is rendered completely unnecessary; conversion would take place regardless. Such reasoning places the non-elect in the same category as persons who have never heard the Word, for this is as much as to say, that men who are ac-

⁴²Ibid., p. 224.

quainted with all the arguments which Christianity affords to produce faith and repentance, have no more advantage towards conversion than the worst of heathens.⁴³

It is true that all the good done by man is the work of God within him. This is not denied. The question is whether God brings this to pass without the consent of the man or whether He brings this to pass by means of internal inducements to man's mind and will.⁴⁴ The Scriptures seem to suppose that man can comply with God's persuasions or ignore them as he chooses. There is no indication that any supernatural, infused, irresistible action is necessary.

Gill's Answer: Conversion is an irresistible act of grace given only to the elect of God. It is a work which is in no way dependent upon any response on the part of man and one which takes place without any consideration of the condition of his will; he is a totally passive recipient. Neither faith, works, nor the proclamation of the Word have any part in regeneration; there is no way of invoking it by any preparatory action. Just as a man cannot be born sooner or later than he is, so can he not be converted sooner or later than he is.⁴⁵ There is no middle ground. A man's regeneration is like the resurrection

⁴³Ibid., p. 263. ⁴⁴Ibid., 286. ⁴⁵Cause, p. 15.

of Lazarus who came forth from the grave by virtue of an infused power which suddenly came into him from a Source outside himself.

Although the Spirit of God is always the efficient cause of conversion, sometimes He chooses to use the proclamation of the Word as a conveying means. Hearing the Word, however, is in no sense a preparation for regeneration, but regeneration is rather a preparation for the right hearing of the Word.⁴⁶ Even so, there are certain effects which may follow the reading of the Word which are not at all related to regeneration but which apply to all men, both to the elect and the non-elect. For example, the proclamation of the Word may awaken a man's conscience or put him in a fear of future judgment. These effects are produced by what is known as the "external ministry of the Word" as distinguished from the "internal ministry of the Word." The latter refers to those occasions when the hearing of the Word merely happens to coincide with the coming of God's irresistible, regenerating grace.

Those who believe that regenerating grace can be resisted fall into the error of making the will of man the chief cause of believing.⁴⁷ Nothing is more certain than that faith is the sole gift of God and the operation of

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 180

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 182.

His power. Unregenerate man is not only incapable of faith but is also incapable of performing any good work, for good works must be done in obedience to the will of God and must spring from faith. Therefore, every so-called good work of an unconverted man is basically evil. Even believers are unable to perform a good work on their own initiative; it is God who performs it within them both to will and to do His good pleasure.

4. Concerning the Freedom of the Will, Whitby's Argument: God extends to man the invitation to salvation and admonishes him towards it, but it is man's responsibility to seek after his salvation. Ever since the Fall, man has been a sinful creature, but the corruption of sin has not totally incapacitated his reason or his freedom. He still has the ability to choose and to believe, and with these faculties, he is able to cooperate with God in effecting his salvation. Although the Fall left man with a definite tendency toward evil, his depravity is by no means so complete as to prevent his having some part in determining his eternal destiny. Not one word of Scripture can be marshalled in support of the doctrine of eternal depravity; rather, the whole Biblical message presupposes that man has a will which he may direct either toward God or away from Him.⁴⁸

⁴⁸Whitby, p. 371.

If man is not capable of performing the conditions of faith and repentance, he is not free; and in so far as he is concerned, the Covenant of Grace is void. If it be said that these things have been rendered impossible because of the consequences of Adam's Fall, then it must be maintained that Adam only possessed real freedom, for he alone had the power of choice in determining his destiny. This theory of total depravity based on Adam's sin leads to the ridiculous conclusion that all of his posterity was left under a disability even before the Covenant of Grace was ratified by the blood of Christ!⁴⁹ Is it not irrational to suppose that man should suffer from a personal sin committed before he was yet a person? If a man breaks his leg from a fall, has he, therefore, sufficient means to walk because he might have done so had his leg not been broken? It is contrary to the nature of God to suppose that He should set up conditions for salvation impossible for a lapsed man to perform and then punish him for what he could not do.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the Scripture clearly charges man's wickedness not to his impotency but to his wilfulness.

No man can be considered truly free unless he, as an individual, has the power of choice and has alternatives from which to choose. The very phrase, "unfrustrable

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 308.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 307.

grace," is irreconcilable with the concept of freedom of the will, for how can a will which has been irresistibly determined be said to have any power to do otherwise? According to this theory, man is an instrument instead of an agent. He is no more free than a tied bird is free to fly.⁵¹ A proposition which has an impossible condition connected to it is equivalent to a negative. No man can be expected to do the impossible. Men are in no sense free if they can only do evil; nor are they free if their wills are irresistibly determined by the grace of God. There is no liberty in what must be done out of necessity. If a man must necessarily sin, he cannot be blamed, and if a man must necessarily serve God, he deserves no credit. In either case, the man cannot be held responsible. God must accept the complete responsibility for the actions of both.⁵²

A belief in the freedom of the will does not do away with the doctrine of God's foreknowledge or omniscience. In the same way that a person's knowledge of a forth-coming event does not necessarily influence the event, so does God's knowledge of the future not necessarily determine what happens. God simply foresees that free actions will be done freely.⁵³ He knows what men might do, yet He also knows what they will do or will not do. It is impossible

⁵¹Ibid., p. 306.

⁵²Ibid., p. 313.

⁵³Ibid., p. 478.

to give a complete explanation of the paradox because of the mystery of God and because of man's inability to conceive of eternity; nevertheless, God's foreknowledge is undoubtedly consistent with the freedom of the will, since, otherwise, all man's actions would be necessary, and this would be repugnant both to the nature of God and to the tone of the Bible.⁵⁴

Gill's Answer: Freedom of the will does not consist in the will's being indifferent or indeterminate to either good or evil. The will of man is free from any co-action or force, but it is, nonetheless, obligated to the will of God. Only God's grace can move the will in anything spiritually good, but this can be done without any infringement on man's natural liberty.⁵⁵ In his state of innocence, man had the power and the will to do both natural and moral good, but the mutable nature of his will gave way to temptation which led him to do evil and left him wholly under the power and dominion of sin. Only his moral liberty was lost at the Fall, however, and this was taken away without any destruction to his natural will; he still remains perfectly free to perform civil actions of life and the external rites of religion. Although a man may be under the strongest dominion of sin, he still acts freely in sinning; and in the same way, a man is never more free in

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Cause, p. 183.

doing spiritual good than when he is under the powerful influence of divine grace.⁵⁶

The imputation of Adam's sin was not a mere arbitrary act of the will of God. The basis of it was the Covenant of the Law which Adam broke. The condition of this contract was that whatever Adam did, whether by way of sin or righteousness, it should be imputed to his posterity. Now the word imputation has no moral connotation, as if to imply a personal accountability for the sin, but it is used in a forensic sense, as when the debts of one man are legally transferred to the account of another.⁵⁷ It is true that God's decree made Adam's fall infallibly necessary (as to the event), yet it was not necessary by way of any force or compulsion of his will.⁵⁸ Nor can God be held responsible for the necessity of the sin of Adam's posterity, for this was not caused by God's act of imputation but by the corruption and vitiosity of nature which Adam's off-spring justly received from their federal parent;⁵⁹ and, although human nature will continue corrupt, it is not contrary to the perfection of God to multiply the specie, which he may continue to do without being the author of its wickedness.⁶⁰

The decrees of God are necessarily fulfilled, but

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 185.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 96.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 156.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 150.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 72.

their fulfillment does not hinder the liberty of the creature in acting. Nothing was more peremptorily decreed and determined by God than the crucifixion of Christ, for example, and yet men never acted more freely, as well as more wickedly, than the Jews did in that tragic event.⁶¹ The liberty of the will is, therefore, consistent with some kind of necessity, but neither God's purposes in eternity nor His predeterminations in time, injure the liberty of man's will or make God responsible for man's sin.

Prescience introduces no fatal necessity: it is, indeed, attended with a necessity of infallibility respecting the event; but not with a co-active necessity upon the wills of men, which are left hereby entirely free, and so they find themselves in the commission of every action; neither the decree of God, nor his foreknowledge, necessitate men, or oblige and compel them to do the things decreed and foreknown; nevertheless, whatever is decreed and foreknown by God is certainly, infallibly, and immutably brought to pass, according to his will.⁶²

The compatibility of necessity and free will is also evidenced by God's hand in providence. His providence directs evil actions as well as good ones. When He moves the will of man to do good, He puts His grace in him, but when He moves man to evil actions, He puts no sinfulness in him but leaves him to the sinfulness He finds and merely moves the natural faculty of the will to these actions.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 9.

⁶²Ibid., p. 203.

His providential concourse, therefore, only attends and assists in the performance of evil but is in no way concerned in the vitiosity of it.⁶³

Since God's decrees do not infringe upon the liberty of man's will, they do not excuse man from sin. The same decree which permits sin also provides for the punishment of it. This may be illustrated by the instance of Zeno and his servant:

Zeno caught his servant playing the thief and beat him for it. The fellow, agreeable to his master's doctrine, as he thought, and in vindication of himself, says that 'he was destined by fate to steal.' 'Yes,' replied Zeno, 'and to be beaten too.'⁶⁴

Some men who do not wish to accept this doctrine have shaped their ideas about God according to their own notions. They have artfully overlooked the distinction between man's natural will and his moral will and have proceeded upon the false assumption that the two are combined. They maintain that if the commands of God must be rule of man's duty, they must also be the measure of man's strength. It is true that God expects man to keep the whole law, but it does not follow from this that he is able to do so. Yet, this disability is not due to any defect in God's power but is due to the corrupt and blameworthy nature of man. The Covenant of Grace antici-

⁶³Ibid., p. 206.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 194.

pated this total disability of man and provided for it.

5. Concerning Eternal Perseverance of the Saints, Whitby's Argument: No man can be sure of his eternal salvation. There is always a danger of falling into sin. God has not promised to uphold man from those sins which He cautions him to avoid, but in so long as a man does persevere, it is the power of God through faith which upholds him. If a man abstains from wickedness, he will be protected from any adversary, but it is possible for a man to wilfully turn from God to wickedness at any time.

The Calvinist belief in eternal perseverance to salvation does not rest so much on Scripture as it does upon the necessary principles of the so-called Covenant of Redemption to which the Scripture is made to conform. Many of the passages produced to prove this doctrine prove only that those who persevere are persevered by divine assistance and not that God has absolutely guaranteed this assistance.⁶⁵ The Bible makes no promise that the righteous who wickedly depart from God shall continue to live despite their iniquities. It exhorts men to penitence and the "fear of the Lord" and warns "destroy not him ... for whom Christ died."⁶⁶ Surely the Biblical admonitions to pray for salvation and to intercede for others are absurd if God has decreed from all eternity

⁶⁵Whitby, p. 385.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 135.

what shall come to pass.

The doctrine of eternal perseverance belittles the danger of sin and makes light of repentance. If it were true that a believer could never totally or finally fall away, he could even commit murder without undue concern. The contrary doctrine, which presupposes the possibility of a believer falling from grace, tends to make men much more careful to avoid violations of the laws of God. It also makes men much more speedy to repent, for, until a renewal of faith has taken place, they know that they stand condemned.⁶⁷

Those who maintain that the doctrine of eternal perseverance is a comfortable doctrine err on two counts. In the first place, how can a man be sure he is not a hypocrite? It is just as uncomfortable to be in doubt about one's sincerity as it is to be in doubt about one's continuance in the way of righteousness. Secondly, whenever a man's conscience pronounces him guilty of wilful sin, he can find no peace apart from penitence, for this alone gives him the inner assurance of pardon.⁶⁸ In any case, a doctrine is not ipso facto true just because it is comfortable. Furthermore, how can the possibility of falling away cause a man any great trouble if he knows that this cannot happen against his

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 465.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 464.

will?

Gill's Answer: The grace of God implanted in the souls of men at the time of their regeneration is an immortal, incorruptible, never-dying seed. All those to whom God gives grace He also gives glory. Those who are chosen for salvation cannot be lost; they persevere to the end. This does not mean that the righteous never fall into sin. Indeed, they sometimes commit gross sins. It means, rather, that not even sin can deprive them from the right to heaven; despite their iniquities, they will never stand condemned before God.⁶⁹ They may waver in their faith, and Satan may greatly distress them, but regardless of their sins or the wiles of the devil, there is no possibility of their finally falling away from the grace of God.

The Bible declares that nothing shall ever be "able to separate from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus."⁷⁰ It also says that regenerating grace is "as a well of water springing up unto everlasting life."⁷¹ Even so, exhortations to continue in the faith are quite properly found in Scripture as a means of increasing steadfastness. The efficient cause of perseverance, however, is the Spirit of God whose work is to no degree dependent upon

⁶⁹Cause, p. 130.

⁷⁰Romans 8:39.

⁷¹John 4:14.

any particular means.⁷² It would greatly reflect upon the power and wisdom of God should He begin a good work within the souls of men and not complete it. Nothing can interfere with his grand and ultimate end, choosing and sanctifying persons to His own glory.

It is "preposterous and irrational" to suppose that any who are regenerated by God's redeeming grace should carelessly and wilfully indulge in sin. Any person who misuses the doctrine of assurance in this way is obviously only of the opinion that he is a child of God. There is no more powerful motivation to holiness than God's absolute promises.⁷³

Any doctrine which is uncomfortable to a sanctified heart cannot be true, but real comfort does not arise from the testimony of a man's conscience. The conscience is too easily deceived and often speaks a false peace. The only true comfort comes when a man apprehends his freedom from condemnation through the blood of Christ. Men are not absolved from guilt by repentance but by receiving the application of Christ's blood which always yields comfort and encourages confidence in God. Anyone who acts from an internal principle of grace has no reason to doubt his sincerity or his continuation in the way of righteousness.

⁷²Cause, p. 135.

⁷³Ibid., p. 199.

Though he may not be able to prove the truth of his faith by better works than a hypocrite, he is aware of an inward principle of love to God which verifies it. Final perseverance does not depend upon the condition of a man's conscience but depends solely upon the power of God which can never be frustrated. A consideration of this fact should be a source of perpetual comfort to the troubled heart.⁷⁴

When Gill published The Cause of God and Truth, he knew that he had said the last word. Whitby died several years before Gill even began his work, so Gill knew from the first that he had chosen a safe opponent. It is doubtful whether Doctor Whitby had ever heard of John Gill. Perhaps it is just as well that the controversy could not be continued, for both men seem to have stated their cases as fully as possible. Each of them reiterated the same points again and again.

The Cause of God and Truth was a tremendous undertaking for Gill. He intended it to be a completely thorough rebuttal to Arminianism, and he, therefore, considered every single verse of Scripture which he felt was in any way related to the subject. The book is difficult to read, partially because of the tedious consideration of every statement made by Whitby but primarily

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 201.

because of the involved and twisted interpretations of Scripture to a predetermined point of view. Whenever he was confronted with a passage of Scripture which seemed on the surface to uphold the position of the opponent, Gill always managed to find a loophole to escape its most obvious meaning. He formulated many arbitrary distinctions which enabled him to distill two quite different meanings from an otherwise straight-forward statement. For example, certain verses refer to "all men" while others refer to "men of all sorts"; some verses refer to man's "spiritual welfare" while others refer to his "civil welfare"; some to "external reformation of life" and others to "inward repentance"; some to God's "secret will," others to His "revealed will." In some instances, when a powerful text was presented by his opponent, Gill simply dismissed it by saying, "You will have to prove it means what it says." The books of both Whitby and Gill are weighted down with a morass of Biblical references which are totally extraneous to both the Biblical context and the argument at hand.

The impact of The Cause of God and Truth was further weakened by Gill's ponderous explanations which often involved self-contradictions. Excerpts like the following one were not uncommon:

Now, though God's decree or determination concerning the final state of man was before

they had done either good or evil, nor was good or evil the cause of the decree; yet neither salvation nor damnation were decreed without respect to good or evil, as has been shown; and, therefore, it could not be unworthy of God to bring creatures into being, whose everlasting fate he had before determined, no, not after the fall of Adam; since the souls he has created, and daily does create, are not made sinful by him, nor are they created by him for misery, but for his own glory.⁷⁵

The book also incorporated flagrant inconsistencies. In one paragraph, for example, Gill insisted that it was improper for man to question the wisdom of God, but on the very next page, he declared that an idea is contradictory to divine wisdom.⁷⁶ He was also guilty of making suppositions about the meanings of many verses of Scripture while, at the same time, he was perpetually telling his opponent that suppositions prove no facts.

There were very few repercussions to The Cause of God and Truth. The publication of Part Four occasioned one bitter response by a Mr. Henry Heywood who branded the whole work as a "heap of rubbish"⁷⁷ but whose temper was mainly aroused by Gill's translations from the Church Fathers. He singled out a number of quotations which he declared were "unworthy even of a schoolboy."⁷⁸ This

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 152.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 154.

⁷⁷Henry Heywood, Defense of Dr. Whitby's Treatise ... against the Late Attempts of Mr. John Gill (London, 1740), p. 4.

attack by Heywood induced Gill to defend himself in a tract entitled A Vindication of the Cause of God and Truth, Part the Fourth⁷⁹ in which he again considered the disputed passages and reaffirmed the correctness of his own renderings of them.

Another indirect repercussion to the Gill-Whitby controversy is found in the Church Record Book of Gill's congregation. There is a notation to the effect that in 1739 two amendments were added to the church's Declaration of Faith and Practice. In Article Three, after the phrase, "God did elect a certain number of men unto everlasting salvation," was added, "whom he did predestinate to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, of his own free grace, and according to the good pleasure of his will." Also, the following passage was inserted between Articles Three and Four:

We believe that God created the first man, Adam, after his own image, and in his likeness; an upright, holy, and innocent creature, capable of serving and glorifying him; but, he sinning, all his posterity sinned in him, and came short of the glory of God: the guilt of whose sin is imputed, and a corrupt nature derived, to all his offspring, descending from him by ordinary and natural generation: that they are by their first birth carnal and unclean, averse to all that is good, incapable of doing any, and prone to every sin; and are also by nature children of

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 19.

⁷⁹John Gill, A Vindication of a Book, entitled, The Cause of God and Truth, Part IV (London, 1740).

wrath, and under a sentence of condemnation, and so are subject not only to a corporal death, and involved in a moral one, commonly called spiritual, but are also liable to an eternal death, as considered in the first Adam, fallen and sinners: from all which there is no deliverance but by Christ, the second Adam.⁸⁰

Gill's dispute with Whitby was remembered for a long time, for The Cause of God and Truth was re-published again and again, even as late as 1855. The Particular Baptists, as well as other Calvinist groups, regarded the work as a definitive apologetic against the Arminians; and wherever the controversy continued, the Calvinists kept a copy of Gill's book nearby to use as a ready reference for upholding their position.

II. JOHN GILL VERSUS JOHN WESLEY

The controversy between the Arminians and the Calvinists continued throughout the century, but until the appearance of the Methodists, the dispute had a decidedly rationalist flavor. In the preaching of John Wesley, however, Arminianism broke forth with renewed fervor and rediscovered the fine theological balance of the original Arminian divine-human equation. John Wesley restored the Arminianism of Arminius. His interpretation of the relationship between God and man was such as to harmonize with human experience.

Serious Thoughts upon Perseverance. John Wesley first came to the attention of John Gill

⁸⁰Church Record Book.

through the publication of a pamphlet which Wesley called, Serious Thoughts upon the Perseverance of the Saints.⁸¹ In this pamphlet, he wrote, "I believe a saint may fall away; that one who is holy or righteous in the judgment of God Himself may, nevertheless, so fall from God as to perish everlastingly."⁸² Then Wesley proceeded to substantiate this conviction by considering several pertinent passages of Scripture. Plainly, the Scripture teaches, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The verse, "He that believeth shall be saved," means "He that believeth, if he continue in the faith, shall be saved."⁸³ This does not mean that God is changeable, for God's very nature requires that if man grows high-minded, he should be cut off from Him.⁸⁴ The phrase, "God is faithful," refers to His faithfulness in fulfilling the conditions of His promises. "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth," is an indisputable declaration against the doctrine of perseverance, for God cannot contradict Himself.⁸⁵ In so long as the Spirit of Christ bears witness to the spirit of the believer, he knows that he is the child of God, but a man may be "a child of God today and a child of the devil tomorrow."⁸⁶

⁸¹John Wesley, Serious Thoughts upon the Perseverance of the Saints, See Wesley's Works (London, 1830), Vol. X, 3rd. ed.

⁸²Ibid., p. 285.

⁸³Ibid., (Ezekiel 28:4).

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 288.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 291, (John 15:1-6).

Therefore, let every man take heed, lest he fall!

With a copy of Wesley's Serious Thoughts before him, Gill edited a pamphlet in reply, saying, "It is to be hoped that he (Wesley) will think again, and more seriously, and that his latter thoughts will be better than his former."⁸⁷ Then he launched out in an attempt to discredit each of the verses introduced by Wesley as proof that the saints do not necessarily persevere. Gill maintained that in each of these Scripture passages there was no concrete evidence that the persons who are said to have fallen away had ever been truly and inwardly sanctified in the first place. Men may profess to have faith and fall from it, but this is no evidence of their having that form of faith which purifies the heart and protects from perishing. Those signified by the "broken branches" in the parable are not true believers but are persons who submit to the outward ordinances of religion and get into the Church by a surface profession of faith instead of an inward work of grace.⁸⁸ The Bible occasionally does propose the supposition that some may fall away, but this does not prove that it ever actually happens.⁸⁹ Gill said:

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 297.

⁸⁷John Gill, The Doctrine of the Saints Final Perseverance, Asserted and Vindicated (London, 1754), 3rd. ed. p. 4.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 13.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 16.

... it clearly appears that those that truly believe, do not draw back unto perdition, but continue in the faith of Christ, and in the true worship of God, until they are everlastingly saved, which is a firm testimony to the final perseverance of the saints: so likewise, that those that draw back unto perdition, were not of the faith, were not true believers, nor ever the just ones that live by faith; so their profession of religion they once made, is no proof of one that lives by faith falling away, so as to everlastingly perish.⁹⁰

Thus, Gill took for granted the point to be proved and argued petitio principii.

Gill also maintained that the doctrine of the saint's perseverance may be concluded from the perfection of God. The wisdom of God, His power, and immutability, are all at stake if it be granted that those whom He intends to save can fall away. Divine justice requires that those for whom Christ died must be saved, and the faithfulness of God insures that those who are once the objects of His love must always remain so.

Furthermore, the doctrine of perseverance is established by the decree of divine election. Predestination to life and eternal glorification are inseparably connected together; the former infallibly secures the latter. Also, the Covenant of Grace, sealed before the world began, can obviously not be conditional. Besides, adoption and

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 21.

justification do not depend upon faith but upon free sovereign grace which puts man into this secure relationship and keeps him there. Gill concluded:

If a man may be confident of any one thing in this world, he may be confident of this very thing, that in whomsoever, whether in himself or in any other, God hath begun a good work, He will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ; and that all the true Israel of God shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; and that not one of them shall eternally perish.⁹¹

Predestination Calmly Considered. Shortly after Gill's reply to Wesley, another pamphlet by Wesley appeared called, Predestination Calmly Considered.⁹² Although this pamphlet was not specifically addressed to Gill, it was obviously written with him in mind. On the basis of Gill's claim that the doctrine of perseverance was established by the doctrine of election, Wesley approached the subject with a thorough criticism of the latter doctrine and, thus, indirectly attacked the former doctrine as well. The direction of his argument proceeded methodically and carefully, and it conveyed a genuine desire to understand the Calvinist position while at the same time persuasively pointed out its weaknesses and inconsistencies. The principle arguments which he developed may be succinctly stated as follows:

⁹¹Ibid., p. 56.

⁹²John Wesley, Predestination Calmly Considered, See Wesley's Works (London, 1830), Vol. X, 3rd. ed.

1. Unconditional election cannot be believed without the "cloven foot of reprobation." ("Find out any election which does not imply reprobation, and I will gladly agree to it.")⁹³

2. One can never speak of the sovereignty of God except in conjunction with His other attributes. ("The sovereignty of God is never to be brought to supercede His justice.")⁹⁴

3. If Christ did not die for certain men, surely they should not be condemned for failure to believe that He did. ("An impossibility in the very nature of the thing.")⁹⁵

4. According to the doctrine of election, neither the elect nor the non-elect can be said to act properly. ("Can a stone be said to act when it is thrown out of a sling?")⁹⁶

5. The blessings of providence evidence no mercy to the non-elect considering the price they must pay for them. ("God is ... only fattening the ox for the slaughter.")⁹⁷

6. Conditional election does not rob God of any glory, for the very power to "work together with Him" is from God. ("Has not even experience taught you this?")⁹⁸

⁹³Ibid., p. 209. ⁹⁴Ibid., p. 220. ⁹⁵Ibid., p. 223.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 224. ⁹⁷Ibid., p. 228 ⁹⁸Ibid., p. 230.

7. God is unchangeable in that He unchangeably loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity. ("Observe this well; for it is your grand mistake.")⁹⁹

Wesley's "calmly considered" arguments aroused an angry answer from Gill. In a storm of pointless protest, he indignantly denounced Wesley, and in self-righteous assurance insisted that Wesley's "miserable piece" had left him "in full possession of all the arguments."¹⁰⁰ The pamphlet he produced in reply, however, indicated that just the opposite was the case. His description of Wesley's pamphlet as a "wild and immethodical performance"¹⁰¹ was infinitely more descriptive of his own. Gill's consideration of Wesley's well-aimed arguments for conditional election, for example, consisted of skilfully skirting around them and boldly begging the question, thus:

... but if it is conditional, the condition is to be named; let him name the condition of it; let him point it out to us, and in what passage of Scripture it is; this lies upon him to do, and I insist upon it ...¹⁰²

Then he appealed to the Seventeenth Article of the Church of England,

... an article of his own church, an article which

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 238.

¹⁰⁰John Gill, The Doctrine of Predestination Stated (London, 1752), 3rd. ed., p. 4.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 15.

he, as a true son of the church has treacherously departed from, an article which Mr. Wesley must have subscribed and sworn to, an article which will stare him in the face as long as subscriptions and oaths stand for anything with him.¹⁰³

He condemned Wesley for bringing the doctrine of election into contempt by making his attack upon the reprobation branch of predestination; this is "beginning wrong, since reprobation is no other than non-election."¹⁰⁴ And instead of seriously facing up to the Biblical references quoted by Wesley, he stooped to ridicule. He said, "The entire book of Esther would have been as much to his purpose as those he has produced."¹⁰⁵ Everything written by Wesley on the subject of election was labelled "harangue, mere noise, and stands for nothing."¹⁰⁶ Gill insinuated at the termination of his pamphlet that it was always possible to tell which disputant has the worst of an argument by the temper he displays.¹⁰⁷ There can be no doubt in the mind of any objective reader that, in this particular instance, the man who had the worst of the argument was John Gill!

Retorts in Poetry. Realizing the futility of reasoning with Gill on an argumentative basis, Wesley changed his tactics by turning from prose to poetry. In 1754 he circulated a satirical poem in which he made a stinging attack against Gill's whole theological system. An excerpt from this

¹⁰³Ibid., pp. 16-17. ¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 21. ¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 26. ¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 45.

lengthy literary accomplishment is printed below:

Arm'd with this firey Dart
 The Enemy drew nigh,
 And preach'd to my unsettled Heart
 His bold presumptuous Lie;
 'You are secure in Heaven,
 '(The Tempter Softly says)
 'You are Elect, and once forgiven
 'Can never fall from Grace.

'You never can receive
 'The Grace of God in Vain:
 'The Gift, be sure, He did not give,
 'To take it back again;
 'Whether you use or no
 'His Grace; you cannot Shipwreck make
 'Of Faith, or let it go.

'You never can forget
 'Your God, or leave Him now,
 'Or once look back, if you have set
 'Your Hand unto the Plow:
 'You never can deny
 'The Lord who you hath brought,
 'Nor can your God his own pass by,
 'Tho' you receive Him not.

'God is unchangeable,
 'And therefore so are you;
 'And therefore they can never fail
 'Who once his Goodness knew;
 'In Part perhaps you may,
 'You cannot wholly fall,
 'Cannot become a Castaway,
 'Like non-elected Paul.¹⁰⁸

In 1755, "a poem in reply to Mr. Wesley's poetical performance"¹⁰⁹ appeared. In view of the fact that this poem was published anonymously and that it was addressed

¹⁰⁸ John Wesley, An Answer to All which the Reverend Doctor Gill has printed on the Final Perseverance of the Saints (London, 1754). See Appendix B.

¹⁰⁹ [Thomas Gurney?], Perseverance; a poem in reply to Reverend Mr. Wesley ... (London, 1755). See Appendix C.

to Gill as well as to Wesley, it was probably penned by one of Gill's admirers rather than by Gill himself. In any case, both the tone and the content of the poem are in keeping with Gill's temperament and theology. An excerpt follows:

Was ever such an empty Answer seen?
 So weak, so wicked, foreign, false, and mean?
 The author only beats the air in vain,
 And aims at something which he can't explain.
 In fine, the whole this mighty Piece affords,
 In Spite, and Pride, and strange unmeaning Words:
 Pleas'd with perverting Sacred Writ, to shew,
 Salvation's not of Grace, but what we do.
 He'd have us think it comes most richly fraught,
 In Answer to the Title, or 'tis understood
 As well as Little John and Robin-Hood.

.....
 Wesley, if thy presumptuous Lye prevail,
 Wisdom may err, and mighty Pow'r may fail:
 Grace may deceive the Person where tis wrought,
 And all that God has said may stand for naught.
 If there's a Breach in Everlasting Love,
 Then Faith is vain, nor are they safe above.
 This truth should never, never be forgot,
 That Jacob's God's a God that changeth not.

.....
 Wesley, no more advance this wretched scheme
 Nor plume thyself by robbing the Supreme.
 No more exalt proud man at the Expense
 Of God's Foreknowledge and Omnipotence.

Mr. Wesley also had an anonymous spokesman. One of his converts, because of his "great respect for the judicious Methodists and their Christian Catholic Spirit," wrote a letter to Gill pleading that he cease "jarring" in order that the Baptists and the Methodists might "harmonize more and more."¹¹⁰ This was an impossible

¹¹⁰A. B., Unity Recommended in a Letter to Gill (London, 1746), p. 9.

request to make of John Gill, for until his dying day, he militantly denied the five distinguishing points which the Arminians maintained. Gill, like the Saviour, "was hung up between two robbers: Antinomianism, which robs God of His grace, and Arminianism, which robs Him of His glory."¹¹¹

¹¹¹Rippon, p. 104.

CHAPTER V

A SYSTEM OF THEOLOGY, PART I

Gill was seventy-two years of age when he compiled his three-volume systematic theology. He had explained each of his beliefs again and again throughout his life, but now, for the first time, he set forth his complete creed and considered each doctrine in relation to the whole. From the beginning of his ministry, Gill had his "system of evangelical truths" well in mind, but never before had he been quite so articulate. Long years of doctrinal controversies and extensive Biblical exposition now made this articulation possible.

Gill wrote his Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity after completing a monumental exposition of the entire Bible. He maintained that no valid doctrinal system could be worked out unless it was preceded by a thorough searching of the Scriptures.¹ This twenty years project (1746-1766) was supposedly designed for just that purpose, to ferret out the doctrines contained in the Sacred Book; but actually, Gill's procedure was quite different from his professed intention. Even the

¹See Chapter II.

least discerning eye can see that Gill, instead of studying Scripture to discover doctrines, used Scripture to bolster and substantiate the doctrines he had already accepted. His Exposition was far from objective. He began the work with such deeply ingrained theological ideas that he found it easy to ignore those sections of Scripture which failed to fit into his theories. Therefore, unfortunately, Gill's nine volume magnum opus is of virtually no interest to the modern reader except as an illustration of the way he approached Scripture and of the way he used it to "prove" his Covenant theology. From Genesis to Revelation, he forced the entire Bible to conform to his doctrine, and thus, his Calvinism became an abstract Scriptural dogmatism. Sometimes he imposed his theology upon Scripture with considerable skill and clarity, but frequently, he was painfully obscure and annoyingly awkward. Nevertheless, this Biblical foundation was the basis upon which Gill believed his theological system rested, and so, he buttressed every argument in his Body of Doctrinal Divinity with an abundance of texts.

The Body of Doctrinal Divinity was intended to be a complete system of theology. Gill did not hesitate to speak of divinity as a science² or to compare it on a par

²Body I, p. ii.

with other spheres of knowledge, such as physics or astronomy. He assumed that a preacher could speak with the same authority and conclusiveness about God as a physicist could speak about Newton's laws of motion, and he believed that the existence of God could be proved. He was well aware of the eighteenth century aversion to summaries of divine truths, yet he was further aware of the increasing popularity of systematic science and was unwilling to relegate theology to an inferior status. His defense of divinity as a science, however, leaned heavily upon his presupposition that the Bible was universally accepted as an infallible book. Gill never seemed able to grasp the fact that some men of his generation seriously questioned the legitimacy of his basic authority. He was content to argue that the truths contained in the Bible came from God and that, once these were collected together, a complete, impregnable system would emerge which no thinking man would dare deny.

I. MAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Natural Theology. A theological system is built upon a knowledge of God. Such knowledge was first given to Adam whose unique understanding of God far exceeded that of all his posterity. In his state of innocence, Adam was made in the image of God and possessed an intimate under-

standing of the divine Trinity of Persons. His likeness to God was in his intellectual and moral nature and in the attributes of his spirit. He had an enlightened reason, a clear conscience, and a free will. After the Fall, however, Adam lost most of his knowledge of God under a cloud of sin. His friendship with the Deity was severed, and his divine image was severely defaced. From that time forward, natural man has groped about like a person in the dark and entertained ridiculous notions about the Godhead. He has retained only a thin shaft of the light of nature, but this is so dim and obscure that the most he can know is that God exists.³ To be sure, as soon as any man begins to exercise his rational powers, he begins to think about God, and as soon as he looks at the world around him or considers the sustaining power of providence, he must inexcusably acknowledge God as Creator and Ruler of the world; but for all practical purposes, natural man possesses no true knowledge of Him -- certainly not enough for salvation, divine fellowship, or Christian living.⁴ Since there is no saving knowledge of God apart from Jesus Christ, natural theology leaves man destitute of that divine revelation which matters most.

Supernatural Theology. The Scriptures reveal that supernatural theology began immediately following Adam's

³Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁴Ibid., p. xiii.

fall. Indeed, the principal doctrines of the Christian faith were made known when God told the serpent that the seed of woman would bruise his head.⁵ This prophecy marked the beginning of the rise of pure revelation, and from that point forward to the coming of Christ, the progress of supernatural theology may be traced. Repeatedly, within the course of time, God has made Himself known to His people through a series of dispensations, each of which announced the coming of the Messiah and declared His eternal salvation. Supernatural theology did not appear in all its purity and splendor, however, until the declaration of the Gospel dispensation in the coming of Christ. The truths of pure revelation which were made manifest by Him are found in the books of the New Testament written "as with a sun-beam":

... the doctrines of a Trinity of divine persons in the Godhead; of the eternal Sonship, distinct personality and deity of Christ, and of his several offices as Mediator; and of the distinct personality and deity of the Holy Spirit; and of his operations of grace upon the souls of men; of the everlasting and unchangeable love of the three divine persons to the elect; of the predestination of them to the adoption of children; and of their eternal election in Christ to grace and glory; of the covenant of grace made with them in Christ and the blessings of it; of redemption by Christ, full pardon of sin through his blood, free justification from sin by his righteousness, and plenary satisfaction for it by his atoning sacrifice; of regeneration, or the new birth; effectual calling; conversion, and sanctification, by the efficacious grace of the

⁵Ibid., pp. xiii-xiv.

Spirit; of the saints final perseverance in grace to glory, and of the resurrection from the dead, and a future state of immortal life and happiness: all which are brought to light by the gospel of Christ. And these are the sum and substance of supernatural theology.⁶

Although Gill's view of the development of Biblical religion (a view shared by all Covenant theologians) is obviously untrustworthy in its interpretation of Scripture, it, nonetheless, helped to prepare the way for a more scientific treatment of Biblical history. The belief that God revealed Himself repeatedly through a series of dispensations within the course of history, is not very far removed from the modern idea that God revealed Himself within the course of history through a series of progressive revelations.

The Attributes of God. Since the sourcebook of supernatural theology is the Bible, men must study it in order to gain a true knowledge of God. All of His divine attributes are magnificently displayed within its pages. These attributes may be divided into two groups, the communicable and the incommunicable. His incommunicable attributes are those which to no degree appear in man, such as His immutability, independence, and eternity; and the communicable ones, which do appear in man, such as His goodness, justice, and wisdom. Even God's

⁶Ibid., p. xxi.

communicable attributes, however, differ so greatly in degree from those found in man that man must never make the mistake of judging God on the basis of a human understanding of them. Things which offend man's limited understanding of wisdom and justice, for example, may be completely acceptable to infinite wisdom and justice. Thus, Gill left the door open for an appeal to total unaccountability on the part of God in His dealings with man. He refused to make God bow down to the rationality of natural man.

The Bible reveals that the primary attribute of God is His sovereign will. This is His distinctive attribute which gives rise to all the others. Indeed, it is His very nature and essence by which all of His perfections are displayed. God is all act; He is actus purus et simplicissimus.⁷ The activity of God is the exclusive cause of everything that takes place. He is directly responsible for all the blessings of providence, and He personally controls every aspect of nature, from the furthest star to the smallest insect. There is no such thing as misfortune or fortune; nothing happens without His immediate awareness, and He participates in every event. He is directly accountable for both health and infirmity, victory and defeat, riches and poverty, life and death. In

⁷Ibid., p. 72.

matters involving evil or sin, however, God works through secondary causes, but even these are inseparably dependent upon the first cause, His sovereign will. God never wills sin for the sake of sin itself, but He readily permits it in order to bring about good.

In a word, every thing that comes to pass in this world, from the beginning to the end of it, is pre-ordained; everything, good and bad; good by his effective decrees, that is, such by which he determines what he will do himself, or shall be done by others; and evil things, by his permissive decrees, by which he suffers things to be done; and which he overrules for his own glory.⁸

The attribute which Gill associated most closely with God's sovereign will was His immutability. God never changes. "If He changes," Gill reasoned, "it must be either for the better or worse; if for the better, then He was imperfect before, and so not God: if for the worst, then He becomes imperfect."⁹ God cannot alter His mind or change His counsels, for they are eternal. Therefore, His purposes are always fully executed, and His divine will is forever immune to frustration. This idea of God's continuous operation of His immutable will, and hence, the assurance of God's having a firm grip upon the affairs of the world, gave to Gill a comforting sense of stability about the universe.

⁸ Ibid., p. 255.

⁹ Ibid., p. 53.

Gill's emphasis upon God's sovereign will and His immutability seems to lead to a rigid determinism. Little room is left for any freedom in man, and even God, whom Gill insisted is perfectly free, appears to be a prisoner to His own decrees. Gill was cognizant of the fact that his emphasis upon these two attributes was not unlike the Stoic doctrine of fate. Indeed, he boldly affirmed that "of all the sects of the ancient philosophies, the Stoics come nearest to the Christian religion."¹⁰ He understood fate to mean the will, purpose, and decree of God, and he readily subscribed to the Stoic teaching that "all things that happen are determined by God from the beginning or from eternity; and that they happen very justly, and always for the best."¹¹

Thus, Gill laid the groundwork for the doctrine of predestination and divine decrees. Like Calvin, he developed his theological system by making repeated appeals to God's sovereign, iron-clad will, and by so doing, he left open a convenient exit from certain difficulties which arose later. Once it is granted that Supreme Will and Power is the clue to the mystery of the universe, a system of theology such as that worked out by Gill does not appear unreasonable. By tracing the origin of every event to God's sovereign will, he both explained and excused every-

¹⁰Cause, p. 191.

¹¹Ibid., p. 192.

thing. Regardless of how contrary events may seem to the character of God, man must simply accept them, for in the final analysis, God's supreme will is inscrutable and is something that man can never hope to understand. Man's highest virtue consists in submitting to the will of God simply because it is His will.

II. THE INTERNAL ACTS OF GOD

From all eternity, God has been active in devising things which should take place in time, and whatever happens in time, stems from divine decrees made in eternity. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between the internal and the external acts of God. The former necessarily precede the latter, for God's external acts are simply the unfolding of His internal acts. When these decrees were devised, God had no other purpose in mind save His own eternal glory, the supreme end to which all other decrees were subordinated.¹²

Eternal Election and Reprobation. The principal decree relating to man was that of divine election. By this act, God predestined certain persons to holiness, happiness, and salvation by Christ before either they or the world were created. Whether God considered man as fallen or unfallen when He made this choice is unimportant.

¹²Body, p. 256.

The important facts are that God called these persons by name, selected them on an equal footing, and chose them unconditionally and for all eternity.¹³

The decree of reprobation also originated in eternity. By this act, God sentenced certain persons to damnation and forever rejected them as possible candidates for salvation. Gill explained that some theologians preferred to speak of this decree as an act of preterition, whereby God, as a result of choosing some persons to salvation, necessarily passed by others whom He left to commit sin, and, thus, to merit damnation. Gill, however, made no apology for the decree of pre-damnation. He did not regard it as simply the accidental consequence of election, as did Calvin. He reasoned that since it was impossible for any man to escape sinning, God might have easily condemned the whole human race without the slightest abrogation of His justice.

The decrees of reprobation and election were inspired solely by God's sovereign will. Gill asked:

...what then could move God to choose one and reject another, but his sovereign good will and pleasure? that then is the sole moving and impulsive cause of such a decree; when we have searched the Scriptures most thoroughly, and employed our reasoning powers to the highest pitch, and racked our invention to the uttermost; no other cause of God's procedure in this affair can be assigned.¹⁴

¹³Ibid., p. 270.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 288-89.

Because of their origin in God's sovereign will, neither of these decrees can be considered unjust. Gill regarded anything that sprang from Sovereign Will as necessarily righteous by definition. He could say simultaneously, (1) God is absolutely free to do whatever He pleases,¹⁵ and (2) God is absolutely righteous in all His ways,¹⁶ but he emphasized God's freedom more than His righteousness. At times Gill seemed on the verge of saying that God is free to do evil. He pressed God's freedom so far that he came perilously close to forgetting His righteousness altogether. In every case, however, he simply equated the two: whatever God wills is necessarily righteous. This is an equation which men of normal judgment might not find difficult to accept if such a doctrine as reprobation were not expounded on the basis of it. Far from being a righteous act, reprobation seems to be an arbitrary act which is merely masquerading as righteous. It is a harsh doctrine, one which seems oblivious to human feelings and clearly open to the charge of cruelty. In applying the doctrine to dying infants, even Gill seemed to weaken, for he said of them, "In a judgment of charity, it may be concluded that they are all chosen."¹⁷ One wonders why the human judgment of charity should be called into play here if it may not be argued elsewhere. This was the closest Gill

¹⁵Ibid., p. 264.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 290.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 275.

ever came to making an appeal to the power of sovereign love instead of to the power of sovereign will.

Although Gill's exposition of the decrees of election and reprobation may seem stern, he at least lifted God above the shallow thinking and feebly sentimentalism so prevalent among those who tend to place all their emphasis upon God's love. By stressing God's sovereign will and power, he also preserved the element of authority in God and the idea of the supremacy of His reign, a concept which modern man has almost forgotten.

Adoption and Justification. Divine election is the first and fundamental blessing from which every other spiritual blessing proceeds. Specifically, these blessings are (1) vocation, (2) faith and holiness, (3) communion with God, (4) adoption, (5) justification, and (6) glorification. Two of these blessings, adoption and justification, were bestowed in eternity, but the others are given within time.

The gift of adoption stands second in importance to the gift of divine election. Adoption takes place when a person is accounted as a son by virtue of his being chosen and put into the relationship of a child to a father. Everyone whom God has elected, He has also adopted as sons, and this was done before their creation. The blessing is

not made manifest, however, until it is acknowledged by faith within time and until the blessing of regeneration has given to the adopted person a suitable nature for the relationship.¹⁸

Next to adoption stands justification. By this act God cleared the elect from sin, discharged them from condemnation, and accounted them righteous for the sake of Christ's righteousness which was imputed to them.¹⁹ He pronounced His people righteous according to the law and saw them as if they had never sinned. It was God's eternal will to punish sin in His Son instead of in His people, and for this reason, His people have been eternally acquitted. This act of justification was fully completed before time, and though it is not made known unto man until he receives the gift of faith, it is to no degree dependent upon faith nor upon man, who is a passive recipient of the blessing.

Gill's doctrine of eternal election raises several questions. Is it possible for a man to be justified before he exists? Can accidents be predicated to a non-entity? And can a man be justified before he sins or before

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 295-96

¹⁹John Gill, The Doctrine of Justification (London, 1756), 4th ed., p. 8.

Christ's satisfaction has been made? Gill answered "yes" to each question. If God can elect men before they exist, then he can certainly justify them before they exist. If Christ's satisfaction is effective for sins not yet committed, then men can surely be justified before they sin.²⁰ Thus, Gill solved both problems by posing two additional ones!

The Covenant of Grace. Eternal election and all its accompanying blessings were made possible by the Covenant of Grace which was transacted by the divine Persons before the creation of man in order to deliver man from the consequences he would incur from the Fall and to restore him into a state of friendship with the Deity. The Covenant was designed by God in eternity and it was accepted with complete accord by both the Son and the Spirit who readily agreed to carry out the Father's proposals. No other plan for the salvation of the elect could have been devised without involving some compromise of the divine perfections, but the Covenant of Grace provided an ingenious way of accomplishing the desired end while at the same time fully satisfied everyone concerned. After considerable heavenly discourse, the perfect plan²¹

²⁰Body, pp. 302-03.

²¹Unlike Witsius, Gill drew no distinction between the Covenant of Redemption made with Christ in eternity and the Covenant of Grace made with the elect in time.

emerged as follows:

1. The Son pledged Himself to effect the reconciliation of the elect by:
 - a) assuming human flesh.
 - b) perfectly obeying the law (in place of the elect who would fail to obey it.).
 - c) suffering the penalty of death (as a propitiation for the sins which the elect would commit).
2. The Father, in turn, promised to give to the Son:
 - a) the strength He would need on earth.
 - b) glory in heavenly places.
 - c) the office of Head of the Church.
 - d) a spiritual offspring among men.

And considering the Son as the federal Head and representative of all the elect, the Father promised the elect through Him:

- a) deliverance from misery and sin.
 - b) justification and acquittal.
 - c) forgiveness and forgetfulness of sins.
 - d) adoption as children of God.
 - e) regeneration as new creatures.
 - f) knowledge of God as Father.
 - g) law in the inward parts.
 - h) a spirit for the working of good.
 - i) perseverance to the end.
 - j) glorification in heaven.²²
3. Then the Holy Spirit promised:
 - a) to form the human nature of Christ.
 - b) to convey the blessings promised by the Father.
 - c) to sanctify the elect.

The role assigned to the Son was that of a mediator whose task it was to interpose between the two estranged

²²Body, pp. 329-31.

parties in order to bring them together again. This should not imply that God has ever lessened His love toward the elect but should indicate that God's injured justice must be appeased with some form of satisfaction for the sins committed against Him. The Son becomes most ideally suited for performing this task by taking upon Himself the nature of man. To be a successful Mediator, it was essential for Him to have both human and divine natures in order to (1) relate Himself to both parties, (2) to make the satisfaction with the same nature that sinned, (3) to be capable of obeying the law, (4) to suffer death, and (5) to be righteous and free from sin. It was especially necessary for the Mediator to be God in order to (1) draw near to God and settle the terms of peace, (2) to give virtue and value to His obedience and sufferings, and (3) to gain the reliance of men.²³

Although the Covenant of Grace was not actually ratified until it was sealed with the blood of Christ at a point within history, the Covenant has been effective ever since it was compacted because of the suretyship of Christ. The word of Christ was His bond. As soon as He agreed to pay the debts of the elect, the obligations of the elect were immediately transferred to Him and

²³Ibid., p. 341.

they were freed from both their bondage to the law and from their punishment incurred for failure to obey it. Because of this eternal suretyship of Christ, the Old Testament saints were able to receive the blessings of the Covenant of Grace long before Christ paid the penalty for their debts with His life on the Cross. This line of reasoning raises a crucial question concerning the objective efficacy of Christ's death. If the Old Testament saints could receive the benefits of Christ's death before He actually died, then to what extent were these benefits directly and ultimately dependent upon His death in the first place? Undoubtedly Gill's answer would be, "only to the extent that God willed it."

Gill's exposition of this doctrine is crass throughout. His description of the divine consultation over the settling of the Covenant sounds loudly of tri-theism and the whole discourse is decidedly antropomorphic in its tone. Furthermore, the Covenant transaction seems coldly legalistic and mechanical. Gill's explanation of the doctrine reads far more like a description of the grinding wheels of the gods than of the everlasting love of God in Jesus Christ.

III. THE FALLEN CONDITION OF MAN

The manifestation of God's internal acts and the administration of His eternal decrees began with the creation of the world.²⁴ He created the world ex nihilo by the mighty powers of His commanding will. Although the creation of man was first in God's intention, God did not create man until He had prepared a paradise-like setting in which to place him. The first man was Adam whom God made in complete maturity and perfection. He was given an immortal nature which was free from the seeds of disease and death, and he was endowed with sufficient knowledge to understand the Deity and to commune with God. Adam was, thus, ideally adapted to his environment and was well equipped to reign over the natural world around him.

The Fall of Adam. Then, in an act of condescension and goodness, God entered into a covenant with Adam. Sometimes this covenant is called a Covenant of Life, for it involved a promise of life, and sometimes it is called a Covenant of Works, for it was conditioned by obedience to a law. God imposed a law upon Adam which prohibited his eating the fruit from a particular tree, and He promised that obedience to this law would bring

²⁴Gill also gave a detailed description of the creation and orders of angels, the disruption in heaven et cetera. Body, pp. 375-84.

to him and to his posterity the blessings of life and immortality but warned that a failure to obey would bring suffering and death. There was nothing intrinsically wrong with the fruit of the tree, but God devised this law as a test to see whether Adam was willing to obey Him in all things. He offered Adam no alternative to the conditions of the Covenant, for it originated in His sovereign will, and God has the privilege to demand of man whatsoever He chooses. It would seem, therefore, that Adam was called upon to obey God just for the sake of obeying Him, and that he was tested just to see whether his obedience would in any way be conditioned by his inability to rationalize the divine command. When the law went into effect, Adam actually possessed the strength and the will to obey it, so God's demand for Adam's "personal, perfect, and perpetual"²⁵ obedience was not unjust.

But Adam failed. He ate the forbidden fruit. Although he was encouraged in this act by his wife, Eve, Adam sinned of his own free will and with a full awareness of what he was doing. What was the nature of his sin? According to Gill, "Sin is a transgression of the law of God"²⁶ or a failure to conform to a divine command. In this case, Adam sinned because he so doubted and disbelieved the importance of the law of God that he wilfully

²⁵Ibid., p. 458.

²⁶Body II, p. 39.

disregarded it. He ignored his God-given knowledge, and in an act of intolerable pride, Adam set himself up against Sovereign Will and refused to obey a divine command. "What is more heinous than Covenant breaking?"²⁷ asked Gill. By eating the forbidden fruit, Adam made void the Covenant of Works and cancelled its promises of life. His act was "the pandora, from whence have sprung all spiritual maladies and bodily diseases; all disasters, distresses, mischiefs, and calamities that are, or have been in the world."²⁸

Original Sin. Although Gill believed that Adam's sin consisted in the failure of his will to obey a divine command, he, nonetheless, believed that Adam's sin was physically transmitted to all his posterity. It seems somewhat strange that an essentially spiritual sin should be transmitted through physical means. Obviously, the association originated at a time when sin was thought of primarily in terms of lust, and hence, in connection with propagation. But like Calvin, Gill realised the necessity of relating the sin of the parents of the race to that of their posterity in order to retain a firm grip upon the doctrine of original sin. Gill's explanation revolved around the theory that Adam was the federal head of the race, and that, as such, he represented all his posterity

²⁷Body I, p. 468.

²⁸Ibid., p. 472.

which was seminally present in his being at the time of his entry into the Covenant with God.²⁹ By virtue of this natural union between him and his descendents, the guilt of his sin and the judicial obligation to satisfy justice were transmitted to all his progeny. "All descending from him by ordinary generation are made sinners by his sin;³⁰ all men are made of one man's blood, and that blood is tainted with sin."³¹ Gill neatly avoided the problem of how this transmission takes place by simply stating that God willed for the guilt to be propagated in this way. It was ordained that this should be done. Gill also failed to distinguish between sin as a naturalistic inheritance and sin as spiritual. He confused the two to the extent of attributing man's spiritual defectiveness to his physical relationship to Adam. Even Adam's tendency to break the divine commandments is passed on to his offspring through propagation.

Another question which Gill evaded is how there can be any individual responsibility for guilt when the sin is inherited. Does this not make mockery of the justice of God? Gill reasoned: if Adam had not fallen, his posterity would have gladly accepted the blessings of his obedience without ever raising the question of justice; therefore, they should be willing to accept the

²⁹Ibid., p. 479. ³⁰Ibid., p. 475. ³¹Ibid., p. 477.

evil results of his disobedience in the same spirit.³² Furthermore, whatever God does must be right. If He wills that man be born in sin, then that fact must be consistent with His divine perfection. Gill reminded:

To silence all complaints and murmurings, let it be observed, that what God gave to Adam, as a federal head, relating to himself and to his posterity, he gave in a way of sovereignty; that is, he might, and might not have given it; he was not obliged to it; ... Who can say to him, 'What doest Thou?'³²

Man's legacy from Adam was more than guilt. The Fall further involved a loss of man's knowledge of God, a loss of his immortal body, and it brought about a general depravity of all his powers and faculties. The only part of man which was not directly damaged by original sin was his soul, for the soul of man is made directly by God rather than through the processes of propagation. Though it inhabits the body, the soul can subsist independently apart by itself, and unlike the body, it is immune to the power of death. Gill reasoned that if original sin had any direct effect upon the soul, the doctrine of the soul's immortality would not stand. Yet, at the same time, he saw the necessity of proving that the soul had also been corrupted by the Fall, for the soul was the seat of the imago Dei which Adam had

³²Ibid., p. 461.

definitely lost. Gill resolved this difficulty in two ways. In the first place, the contagion of a sinful body corrupts the soul with the infection of sin when the two are united together. In the second place, God no longer creates souls according to His original pattern but patterns them according to the defaced imago Dei which Adam suffered at the Fall.³³ Thus, there is no part of man which is free from the pollution of sin. He is corrupt in both body and in soul. At this point Gill left himself most vulnerable, for, apparently, he believed that this corruption also effected man's mind and damaged his rational powers. If this be the case, one wonders by what authority Gill placed such confidence in the reliability of his own mental processes! This question never occurred to him, but if it had, he would no doubt have maintained that this facility for correct reasoning was restored at the time of one's conversion.

The Servitude of the Will. Gill's doctrine of original sin virtually denies the freedom of man's will. Man has been left so completely corrupted and depraved by the Fall that he is absolutely unable to know or to do anything toward his own salvation. All of his natural abilities have been so badly impaired by the consequences of Adam's sin that his only hope for changing his sinful

³³Ibid., p. 490.

condition lies in the possibility of his being totally renovated by the overwhelming power of God's supernatural grace. This does not mean that man has lost complete possession of his reason or that he no longer has any use of his will. In affairs other than spiritual, he still possesses the ability to discern one thing from another and to exercise his power of choice accordingly. His reason and his will were corrupted by the Fall, but they were not annihilated; yet, both are now totally ineffective toward doing anything pertaining to the affairs of God. Even the slightest movement toward good or the first step in conversion lies outside the range of man's powers. He is unable to move except in the direction of evil. His state of original sin issues in multiple actual sins; he is a corrupt tree which bringeth forth nothing but corrupt fruit.³⁴ Only conversion can turn the will of man from evil to good, but unless this takes place, man is free only to do evil. Unlike Calvin, Gill was never willing to admit that his doctrine of original sin deprived man of his freedom. He reasoned that, even though man be constrained to commit sin, he, nonetheless, exercises his freedom in the very act of sinning. Gill saw no inconsistency in saying that man necessarily sins but sins voluntarily. Thus, man's so-called freedom of will becomes a servitude to sin. Man's sin appears to consist

³⁴Ibid., p. 491.

in the fact that he is not God. Gill's doctrine of God made it impossible for him to conceive of God's indulging in any form of experimentalism or taking any risk in His dealings with man. He had to choose between emphasizing God's sovereign will and man's freedom of will, and he chose the former. This choice made it impossible for Gill to take the idea of man's freedom seriously.

IV. THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE

The Singularity of the Covenant. Immediately after the Fall, the Covenant of Grace dawned upon the world and was administered within the course of human history. By presupposing that this Covenant had been conceived and implemented in eternity by the immutable will of God, Gill found it necessary to affirm that God has never had but the one plan of salvation and that He has always related Himself to man through this one Covenant only. The plan of salvation has been the same from the beginning. There is the same promise of deliverance, the same Redeemer, the same conditions, and the same blessings for all those who are chosen. Christ is the substance of the Covenant. He was given for all the people of God, for both the Jews and the Gentiles, and He is the same in the yesterday of the Old Testament and in the today of the New Testament and

forever. "The patriarchs, before the flood and after it, before the law of Moses and under it, before the coming of Christ, and all the saints since, are saved in one and the same way."³⁵ Hence, Gill placed the Law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ on essentially the same level and declared the differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament to be largely superficial.

The Two Dispensations. Although the Covenant of Grace is but one, there are two administrations of it: before the coming of Christ and after His coming. Whenever the Bible mentions the "old covenant," it does not refer to a former covenant but to the earliest dispensation of the Covenant of Grace. Although these two administrations of the Covenant are fundamentally alike, they differ in the following ways:

1. The first administration looked forward to the coming of Christ, whereas the second looked backward upon His having come.

2. The second is considerably more clear than the first.

3. The spirit of liberty is more manifest in the second administration.

4. The second administration possessed a greater effusion of the gifts of the Spirit.

³⁵Body II, p. 1.

5. Whereas the first administration was primarily nationalistic in its outreach, the second included persons from many nations.

6. The second administration will never give way to a third in the way that the first administration gave way to the second.

7. Each of the administrations observed different ordinances.³⁶

Everywhere Gill looked in the Old Testament, he saw Christ. From the fall of Adam to the Nativity, Gill saw the Saviour in history, law, and prophecy. In the most unlikely places He was revealed: through types and figures, shadows and sacrifices, persons and events. The clothes worn by Adam after the Fall represented the garments of salvation. Abel's offering evidenced the doctrine of election. Noah's ark symbolized the Church. The ram slain in Isaac's stead revealed the doctrine of the atonement, and Rahab's scarlet thread indicated the blood of Christ. David's Psalms contain innumerable references to Christ, and the prophets spoke copiously of every truth concerning Him. Furthermore, all of the Old Testament anthropomorphisms were purposefully placed there in order to prepare men for the coming of Christ in the flesh. Gill reasoned that one should logically expect to

³⁶Ibid., pp. 3-5.

find Christ in the Old Testament. (1) If all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, then these doctrines should be found in all parts of Scripture. (2) If the knowledge of Christ is necessary for salvation, then this knowledge must have been available to the prophets and the patriarchs. (3) If God never changes, then His Covenant relationship to man must have always remained the same.

God did not intend to continue the first administration of the Covenant of Grace indefinitely. He knew that through the course of time it would gradually prove to be faulty and ineffective. Obviously, the people of all nations could never be convened in one country and worship at the same altar. Therefore, the imperfect sacrificial system of the Hebrew priests and the types and intimations of Christ contained in the Old Testament had to be pushed aside in favor of the brilliant manifestation of Jesus Christ in the second administration, the sum and substance of the Covenant of Grace.

CHAPTER VI

A SYSTEM OF THEOLOGY, PART II

The second administration of the Covenant of Grace began when Christ was finally revealed in His full glory within history. Ever since the beginning of the race, God had held Christ up before the elect as the object of their faith and as the sole surety for their salvation. Now, at last, He appeared within time and fulfilled the conditions of the Covenant which He had pledged to the Father before the foundation of the world.

I. THE MANIFESTATION OF THE COVENANT IN CHRIST

The coming of Christ into the world gathered up and affirmed all of the foreshadowings and partial exhibitions of Him which were made during the first administration of the Covenant. His coming in no way abrogated the past, but the whole system of religion which had reigned previously was now seen in its total significance. Certain laws which had existed only to point toward Christ were obviously no longer needed. The ceremonial laws, for example, had no further use-

fulness after Christ had made the final and perfect sacrifice.

The Perfect Standard of Righteousness. The moral law of Moses, however, is still binding. Even though this law has been abolished as a Covenant of Works because of man's sin, it still remains the perfect standard of righteousness which man is expected to obey. To be sure, no man since Adam could possibly realise the promise of salvation attached to the law, but, nonetheless, it still stands. The law serves a most important function in relating man to Christ, for man's very inability to obey the law causes him to look elsewhere for his salvation. If there were no law, there would be no sin,¹ for it is the law that convinces man of sin and restrains him from sin. It acts as a mirror in which he may see the mind and will of God and by which he may measure himself accordingly. Far from making the law void, the coming of Christ established the law. Gill explained:

It was a notion, that some years ago obtained, that a relaxation of the law, and the severities of it, has been obtained by Christ; and a new law, a remedial law, a law of milder terms, has been introduced by him, which is the gospel; the terms of which are faith, repentance, and new obedience: and though these are imperfect, yet being sincere, they are accepted by God, in the room of a perfect righteousness. But every article of this scheme

¹Body II, p. 195.

is wrong; for, the law is not relaxed, nor any of its severities abated; there is no alteration made in it: neither with respect to its precepts, nor its penalty; it requires the same holy, just, and good things, it ever did; Christ came not to destroy it but to fulfil it ...²

On one occasion Christ Himself summarized the law in two commandments, namely, to love God and to love one's neighbor. As a rule of obedience, the moral law presents the demands of God to every man and remains the perfect standard of righteousness which is universally imposed upon all. "It is equally binding upon saints and sinners alike; and in so long as God is God and man is man, it must always remain so."³

The Need for a Mediator. Without the Gospel, man would be in a pitiable condition. He would be unable to measure up to the perfect standard of righteousness demanded by God in the law, and he would be unable to rid himself of the guilt he has incurred by breaking the law. The good news of the Gospel is that God has provided a Mediator -- Jesus Christ -- to do for man what he cannot do for himself.

It was necessary for the Mediator to be both God and man in order to do the work which the situation required. Even an uncorrupted man could not ascend to God, so man's only hope lay in the willingness of God

²Ibid., p. 240.

³Body III, p. 100.

to condescend to him. Who but a divine being could restore sinful man to heavenly favor? What could conquer sin save righteousness? Yet, only as a man could the Mediator enter into the human situation and become subject to the law of God. If he were not man, there would be no way for him to take upon himself man's punishment. The same nature that sinned had to make the satisfaction, for, otherwise, there would be no virtue in his righteousness. For these reasons, therefore, the Mediator needed both human and divine natures, a human nature to suffer the punishment of sin and a divine nature to triumph over it. Gill explained:

... as man, he had blood to shed for the remission of sin and a life to lay down for the ransom of sinners; and as God, he could support the human nature in union with him under the weight of sin laid on it; and bear the whole of the punishment due unto it with cheerfulness, courage, and strength.⁴

The union of these two natures in Christ is "mysterious, incomprehensible, and not to be accounted for upon the principles of natural reason."⁵ Christ assumed the human nature to His divine nature and indissolubly united both of these natures to His Person. There was no communication of one nature to the other, though both natures completely concurred in all His work. As both body and soul are integral parts of a man without being

⁴Body II, p. 198.

⁵Ibid., p. 50.

intermingled, so were the two natures joined together in Christ. The entire properties of both natures are completely present in Him, yet the two natures constitute only the one Person, Christ. It cannot be said that the Deity of Christ suffered or that the humanity of Christ is everywhere, but it may be said that the Son of God suffered and that the Son of Man is everywhere. The flesh of Christ is not to be worshipped, but the incarnate God is; therefore, it is wrong to call His Deity humanity and His humanity Deity.⁶

Christ the Prophet. Gill followed Calvin in outlining the three offices of the Mediator: Prophet, Priest, and King. As a prophet, Christ was the mouthpiece of God through whom He communicated His mind and will to man. Christ was a messenger from heaven, a divine teacher, and a witness to the Truth. He acted as a prophet when He proclaimed the glad tidings to the poor, when He foretold future events, and when He interpreted the meaning of the law. He was a prophet not only in word but also in deed. Every miracle He performed pointed to God, and everything He did was an incarnate revelation of what He said. It was Christ the Prophet who spoke through the prophets of the Old Testament, and it is the exalted Christ who, in cooperation with the Spirit, con-

⁶Ibid., pp. 61-62.

tinues to speak through prophets today. As a prophet, Christ possesses the plenitude of divine wisdom which He perpetually mediates to men.

Christ the Priest. Christ was consecrated and ordained to be a priest in the eternal council of the Trinity of Persons when God entered into mutual transactions with Christ to guarantee the salvation of the elect. The work of a priest is threefold: (1) to act for other men in things pertaining to God, (2) to offer sacrifices for sin, and (3) to make intercession. In the office of a priest, Christ the Mediator procured for man the favor of God. This involved interposing Himself between divine justice on the one hand, and sinful man on the other, in order to heal the breach between them through measures of peace.

At this point, Gill presented his doctrine of the atonement.

Previous to his redemption, man was in a state of bondage and captivity. He was under the sentence of the law which he had broken both as a son of Adam and as a sinner in his own right. The sentence of the law had pronounced him guilty, and because of this verdict, he was held in subjection to eternal death, the just punishment of sin. Thus, man had become enthralled to the

vindictive justice of God who refused to relax the sanction of His law without a full and complete satisfaction for the sin thereby incurred. The satisfaction which He demanded was perfect obedience to His standard of righteousness, obviously a price which sinful man could never pay. Man's only hope lay in finding "someone else" to make the satisfaction in his stead, for God admitted His willingness to accept the work of a substitute. Such a substitute was found in Jesus Christ, the heavenly Priest. He graciously offered Himself in the place of man, both to satisfy the demands of the law with the price of perfect righteousness and to satisfy the offended justice of God by taking upon Himself the consequences of human sin.⁷

Christ began to pay this price the moment He was born. His whole life was one of complete obedience to the will of God, even though it involved humiliation and suffering. It was humiliating for Him to be born of a woman, to take the form of a servant, and to suffer from the weaknesses of human flesh, yet He subjected Himself to this role in complete and voluntary obedience. He shouldered the full weight of the law. He obeyed the rules of His parents, lived by the civil laws of men, and measured up to every single commandment of the Mosaic Code. Thus, as a representative of sinful man,

⁷Ibid., p. 192.

Christ kept the whole moral law; and because He had done this in their stead, He was in a position to transfer the righteousness which was His unto them.

Gill accepted the distinction between the active and the passive obedience of Christ.⁸ His active obedience consisted in His total conformity to the precepts of God (by which He fulfilled all righteousness), and His passive obedience consisted in His willing acceptance of God's punishment for human sin. The penalty for sin was nothing less than suffering and death, but Christ chose to endure it of His own free will. By virtue of His being an infinite Person, He was able to bear the whole of man's everlasting punishment all at once,⁹ and, as a representative of the race, He was able to free man from the hands of offended justice with the price of His blood. Christ was simultaneously both sacrifice and priest, for He gave up His life in the very act of mediating on man's behalf.

Gill was careful to point out that Christ was put to death in His human nature only, for divine nature is eternally impassible. Also, the soul of Christ did not die; yet, in a very real sense, it may be said that He suffered death within His soul. Death always involves

⁸Ibid., p. 87.

⁹Ibid.

(1) a sense of separation from God and (2) an awareness of divine wrath. Christ endured the former death when He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?",¹⁰ and the latter death when He surrendered His body to be crucified. Christ made a full and complete satisfaction for the sins of men. By dying and suffering in their stead, He performed a wholly acceptable act, well-pleasing to God. Though the manner of His death on the ignominious cross was a symbol of the curse of God, He was not actually cursed by God; and because of the propitiation and atonement¹¹ which took place on the cross, it has now become a symbol of blessing.

Gill emphasized the fact that the whole plan of redemption was grounded in divine love. The satisfaction of Christ was not the cause of the love of God, but the death of Christ was, to the contrary, the fruit and effect of God's love. The love of God for His elect is invariable and unchanging, but His everlasting arms had been obstructed by sin which had to be removed before man could realise this love. Indeed, the death of Christ was the strongest expression of divine love. The situation

¹⁰Mark 15:34.

¹¹Gill used the words satisfaction, propitiation, and atonement interchangeably. See The Necessity of Christ's Making Satisfaction (London, 1766), p. 282.

demanded that either the sinner or Christ should die, and the love of God was such that He chose the latter alternative.¹²

Furthermore, the payment of Christ's life was to God and not to Satan. Since the power of Satan is only a usurption of divine power, he had no legal right to hold man captive in the first place. God Himself delivered sinners out of Satan's control by an act of sovereign power -- not with a purchase price. The payment of Christ's life had nothing whatsoever to do with Satan. He gave His life as a ransom for the release of man from God's avenging justice. By so doing, Christ (1) made an end of sin, (2) brought man into an open state of friendship with God, (3) magnified God's law, (4) secured for man an immunity from penal evil, and (5) glorified God's justice.¹³

One cannot ask whether God could have forgiven the sins of men without Christ's satisfaction. According to Gill, this is an improper question. It seems clear, however, that any forgiveness without satisfaction would have made a mockery of divine justice and signified weakness. He said:

God indeed is not under another; he is of himself, and can do what he pleases; he is the maker and

¹²Body II, pp. 195-96.

¹³Ibid., p. 206.

and judge of the law; but then he is a law to himself; his nature is his law, and he cannot act contrary to that.¹⁴

Therefore, concluded Gill, it is impossible to see how forgiveness could have been accomplished in accord with God's perfection. This reasoning seems sufficiently conclusive until one ponders its relationship to Gill's doctrine of eternal justification. If the elect were absolved from the consequences of sin even before they were born, it is not only difficult to understand the significance of the redemption, but it is also difficult to take seriously the fact of their sin. Gill's theology poses the insoluble dilemma of having the elect redeemed from eternity and yet condemned within time. If God's everlasting love for the elect overlooked their sin before it was committed and dispensed with divine wrath before it was ever felt, and if He did this by virtue of a redemption which had not yet been ratified, the whole plan of salvation appears somewhat superfluous!

Another function of the office of priest which Christ fulfills is that of intercession. From the beginning of the world He has interceded before God on behalf of the elect. He intercedes for the conversion of the unconverted, the comfort of those convinced of sin,

¹⁴Necessity of ... Satisfaction, p. 491.

and for the steadfastness of those who encounter temptation. Christ's intercession has never ceased, though the manner of His intercession has altered since the ratification of the Covenant of Grace with His blood. He can now intercede, not as one asking a favor, but as an advocate in open court who pleads and demands according to the law. He is now able to speak in an authoritative way on the basis of what He has suffered, and He can insist that such and such blessings be bestowed. However, all He needs to do is simply to show Himself before God, for His perpetual appearance in the divine presence is a constant witness to His having done all that law and justice could require.¹⁵

Christ the King. The humiliation of Christ terminated with His burial. Then His exaltation began. His soul was received into heaven the moment He expired, and shortly thereafter, His whole body was resurrected with majestic grandeur. Christ did not descend into hell. Since He had already preached to the Old Testament saints during their lifetime, there was no occasion for Him to be concerned about the state of the departed spirits.¹⁶ Instead, Christ was lifted up from the grave by the mighty power of God and was magnified as the King of mankind and the Ruler of the world.

¹⁵Body, II, pp. 129-30.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 90.

Christ is King in a two-fold sense. In one sense, His kingdom extends over all men, but in a limited sense, He reigns over a special kingdom which includes the elect only.¹⁷ In the first sense, He shares the rule of the Father with whom He controls the affairs of providence and holds sovereign sway over both the good and the bad. In the second sense, He is the King of the Church, the community of the elect. These are His favoured subjects, and to them He guarantees (1) protection and preservation, (2) victory over sin, and (3) triumph over death. As King of the Church, Christ is its eternal defender. He reigns over it through (1) the external ministry of the Word, (2) the observation of the ordinances, and (3) the code of church discipline. He rules over it internally by the presence of His Spirit in the hearts of believers.¹⁸

Christ has always ruled as King, but He has exercised His kingly office in a more visible and glorious manner since the Ascension. Since His exaltation to the "right hand of the Father," there has been a more plentiful effusion of His Spirit within the Church and a more varied bestowal of gifts and graces upon His people.¹⁹ Eventually, however, the present spiritual reign of Christ will be replaced by His personal reign, for at some point in the future, He will come to the earth to judge the

¹⁷Ibid., p. 137. ¹⁸Ibid., pp. 144-45. ¹⁹Ibid., pp. 150-51.

world.

II. THE BLESSINGS OF THE COVENANT

The Limited Redemption. The central blessing which flows out of the Covenant of Grace is that of the redemption of God's people. The love of God in Christ was a special and discriminating love which was not directed towards men at large but was lavished upon the elect alone. The extent of Christ's redemption coincided exactly with the extent of God's election.²⁰ Only those whom He has chosen will be redeemed, and unless a man has been chosen, he is excluded from the benefits of Christ's death. Where the Scripture says that Christ "should taste death for every one," it does not mean that Christ died for all men but that He experienced every kind of death.²¹

Gill defended this doctrine of a limited atonement without calling in either Calvin or Witsius for his support. He defended it by arguing that the idea of a limited atonement was the only explanation which could account for the obvious fact of non-universal salvation without jeopardizing any one of the attributes of divine perfection. He compared his doctrine with the alternative doctrine of universal redemption (that is, redemption

²⁰Ibid., p. 170. ²¹Ibid., pp. 184-85, (Hebrews 2:9).

which is potentially effective for all men but dependent upon man's response), and he endeavored to show that the universal doctrine was incompatible to divine perfection; and since whatever reflects upon divine perfection cannot be true, the doctrine of a limited atonement is the only doctrine of redemption that will stand. He reasoned that the universal scheme reflects upon God in the following ways:

1. It reflects upon the wisdom of God. If God had intended for all men to be saved, He is sufficiently wise to have worked out a scheme of salvation whereby they would be saved. God always sets up adequate means to attain His desired ends. Where is the wisdom in forming a plan which fails?

2. It reflects upon the power of God. Either God wanted to save all men or He did not want to save them. If he wished to save them and has not done so, then He must be lacking in sufficient power to execute His will.

3. It reflects upon the love of God. His love cannot be very strong if it does not definitely insure the salvation of anyone.

4. It reflects upon the justice of God. If Christ died for the sins of all men and the punishment of their sins was inflicted on Him, it is surely unjust for multitudes of men to endure the same punishment again. Where is the justice in paying a double penalty for a single

offence? Either Christ has made satisfaction for every man or He has not; if He has, then all man should be set free from their punishment, but if He has not, then His work was in vain.

5. It reflects upon the mutability of God. According to the universal scheme, God is not reconciled but is merely made reconcilable. This means that He must be continually changing in his attitude toward man, ready to damn him in one moment and to save him in the next.

6. It reflects upon the glory of God. His mercy would not be nearly so apparent if all men were saved, and He would be unable to glorify Himself through His justice if some men were not condemned.²²

Gill seemed unimpressed by the fact that his objections to the universal scheme could be readily answered and could be answered in a way which cast similar reflections upon his own scheme.

1. Would the God of wisdom urge all men to repent and believe unless He had devised a scheme whereby this were possible? The wisdom of the universal scheme lies in the fact that it makes salvation available for all men and yet ingeniously avoids imposing it upon any one.

2. Ultimately, the power of God is to no degree minimized by giving man the freedom to accept or reject

²²Ibid., pp. 173-75.

the offer of salvation. Whether through salvation or condemnation, no man escapes God. His power prevails in the end.

3. It is a reflection upon the love of God to suggest that He wilfully withholds His love from any of His creatures. Surely God's love would be infinitely more magnified if it were inclusive of all.

4. If all men have sinned, then justice demands that all men have equal access to salvation. Would the God of justice play favorites?

5. God is immutable, but man is not. God's attitude toward man always remains the same, but man can change his attitude toward God. It is God's will to save man, but man is free to choose condemnation.

6. The chief glory of God is the salvation of man, but if man rejects His salvation, God is nevertheless glorified through the execution of His justice.

Gill virtually acceded to the fact that his doctrine of a limited atonement has a questionable Biblical basis, for he felt that it was necessary to consider "several passages of Scripture which, at first sight, may countenance the universal scheme."²³ These passages may be divided into three classes: (1) those in which the words all and everyone are used in connection with the benefits of Christ's death, (2) those in which the words world

²³Ibid., p. 178.

or the whole world occur, and (3) those which seem to intimate that persons for whom Christ died may perish. A representative verse from the first group is, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men to me." According to Gill, this simply means that a great crowd of people were to witness Christ's crucifixion.²⁴ Another illustration is the phrase, "if one died for all." In this case, said Gill, it is significant to notice that the word all is not followed by the word men. It is certain from the general sense of Scripture that the all was intended to refer to all of God's people or to all whom Christ came to save.²⁵ A representative verse from the second classification is, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." According to Gill, Christ spoke this verse as a rebuke to the Jews who thought that they alone were the objects of God's love; therefore, the word world should be understood to mean Gentiles as opposed to Jews.²⁶ The phrase "all the world" is found frequently in the Bible, but it is seldom intended to be taken in a literal sense -- such as, "All the world should be taxed."²⁷ The third classification of verses likely to be misinter-

²⁴Ibid., p. 180 (John 12:32).

²⁵Ibid., p. 182 (II Corinthians 5:14-15).

²⁶Ibid., p. 186 (John 3:16).

²⁷Ibid., p. 187 (Luke 2:1).

preted may be represented by, "Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died." The destruction mentioned here cannot possibly refer to a man's eternal destruction for only God can finally destroy a man. The verse is merely a precaution against disturbing the peace of mind of a weak brother.²⁸ In this manner, one by one, Gill brushed aside nearly every verse which seemed "on the surface" to favor the universal scheme of redemption. Then he had the audacity to say, "It is a rule to be observed, that a literal sense (of Scripture) is not to be departed from without necessity."²⁹ Obviously, Gill found it exceedingly necessary to depart from the literal sense in order to uphold his doctrine of the limited atonement! It is also clear that his final authority was not the Bible but the subjective judgment of John Gill.

Gill's exegesis scarcely demands an answer. In the first place, there is no justification for seeking an obscure under the surface meaning to such straightforward statements as, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish." What possible reason can be given for qualifying a verse like this except to make it conform to a pre-conceived doctrine? Also, Gill is flagrantly inconsistent. By what right can he interpret the all of "will

²⁸Ibid., p. 188 (Romans 14:15). ²⁹Cause, p. 160

draw all men to me" to mean "all sorts of men" while at the same time contend that the all of "by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation"³⁰ means literally all men? Furthermore, Gill failed to explain several of the strongest passages for the universal scheme, such as the one following:

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.³¹

It is difficult to imagine how even Gill could evade the weight of verses like these.

One strongly suspects that Gill never divulged the real reason why he adhered to this doctrine. Perhaps he was not completely aware of it himself. The doctrine seems to be an attempt to rationalize his observation that some men persistently refuse to respond to the Gospel whereas others receive it gladly. Gill was not untouched by the rationalism of the age in which he lived. Confronted by the fact that all men do not respond to the Gospel, he reasoned that some men were never intended to respond to it. He was convinced that this was the will of God, and therefore, he found it necessary to rationalize

³⁰Romans 5:18

³¹I Timothy 2:3-6.

this conviction into his theological system:

As it is certain in fact that all men are not saved, it is as certain that it is not the will of God that every man and woman should be saved.³²

Gill's doctrine of election and the limited atonement represent an effort to give a rational explanation of what seemed to be an obvious fact. He reasoned that Christ could not have died for all men in view of the fact that only some men are saved. His logic was just the reverse of that of a Universalist theologian who reasons that since Christ died to save all men, then all men must eventually be saved. Gill himself said on one occasion:

It should be observed, that it is agreed on both sides, that all are not eventually saved: could universal salvation be established, there would be no objection to universal redemption.³³

Gill's doctrines of the election and the limited redemption are pat explanations which neatly account for the response men make to the Gospel, but these doctrines do not explain why God chose to save some men and to reject others. There is no answer to this question. The most Gill can say was, "Christ has redeemed those He has redeemed."³⁴ This statement is a point in Gill's favor, for here, at long last, he suspended rationality before the

³²Body II, p. 183.

³³Ibid., p. 173.

³⁴Ibid., p. 170.

face of God. He should have suspended it earlier, for if he can give no reason here, he had no right to formulate the doctrine of a limited atonement in the first place. The inclusiveness of God's plan of salvation is a fundamental mystery which man can never fathom.

Effectual Calling and Regeneration. Every man whom Christ has redeemed will be effectually called to salvation and will receive the blessing of regeneration. Although many men will be exposed to God's external call through the hearing of His Word, only the elect will receive His internal call which irresistibly results in regeneration. This internal call is an unsolicited act of God which He carries out by invading man's heart with His Spirit and overcoming man's conscience with His grace. The internal call usually accompanies God's external call, but the two are not necessarily connected together.³⁵ There is nothing man can do to precipitate God's internal call; He is not moved by man's misery nor is He influenced by pleas or repentance. Only those whom He has eternally destined to salvation will receive the call, and not a single one of them will be overlooked.

Previous to regeneration, men are morally dead. They have no knowledge of spiritual things, no affection for

³⁵Ibid., p. 286.

them, and no power to perform them. Regeneration does not consist in the repairing of the ruined image of God in man. It is a totally new work which can best be described as a new birth:

... the first birth is of sinful parents, in their image; the second birth is of God, and in his image; the first birth is of corruptible, the second birth of incorruptible seed; the first birth is in sin, the second is in holiness and righteousness; by the first birth men are polluted and unclean, by the second birth they become holy and commence saints; the first birth is of the flesh, and is carnal, the second birth is of the Spirit and is spiritual, and makes men spiritual men; by the first birth men are foolish and unwise ... by the second birth they become knowing and wise unto salvation: by the first birth they are slaves to sin and the lusts of the flesh ... by the second birth they become Christ's free men; by the first birth men are children of wrath ...; at the second birth they appear as objects of the love of God.³⁶

Regeneration is something de novo implanted in the heart. It involves something which was never before in human nature: a principle of spiritual life infused into the soul. Just as a seed contains all that eventually grows out of it, so does this principle of spiritual grace contain all of the fruits of the Spirit which later appear.

Regeneration is closely associated with conversion, but the two should be distinguished. "Regeneration is the motion of God towards and upon the heart of a sinner, and conversion is the motion of a sinner towards God."³⁷ In

³⁶Ibid., p. 268.

³⁷Ibid., p. 292.

regeneration men are wholly passive, as they are also in the first moment of conversion, but after infused grace makes its initial impulse, man's unwilling will begins to turn willingly. He turns from his own "righteousness" to the righteousness of Christ, from things carnal to things spiritual, from the earthly to the heavenly. This distinction between regeneration and conversion makes Gill's theology ideally suited for the acceptance of infant baptism. Since man has no part in the process of regeneration, it would seem that this could take place in the life of a child; whereas, the process of conversion, in which man does participate, could take place gradually as the child grows into maturity. There is no indication that Gill ever realised the compatibility of this theological distinction to Calvin's doctrine of infant baptism.

It is impossible for the elect to resist regeneration and conversion. "When God has purposed to convert a sinner, who can disannul it?"³⁸ He is not conditioned by anything done by man; nothing is a pre-requisite to regeneration and nothing can stand in its way. The death of elect infants clearly illustrates the fact that neither faith, nor moral suasion, nor obedience, is a determining factor.³⁹ When God's mighty hand of grace is stretched out, no

³⁸Ibid., p. 300.

³⁹Ibid., p. 275.

human action can turn it back, and when it is withheld, there is no means to demand it.

Gill's explanation of regeneration gives rise to several objections. In the first place, the doctrine destroys every element of human responsibility. Even though man may be desirous of salvation, he is left utterly helpless and unable to make any move toward his spiritual good unless God sees fit to effect the necessary change. In the second place, the doctrine leaves absolutely no room for freedom of the will. Those who are chosen cannot resist God's grace, and those who desire salvation have no opportunity to receive it. Finally, the doctrine is based upon a "principle of infused grace" which Gill described with physical connotations. This sounds very much like Roman sacramentalism. Gill would be shocked at the very suggestion, but he would be hard pressed to distinguish between the two. Furthermore, he confused the principle of infused grace with the Holy Spirit, for he sometimes used them interchangeably. Gill always seemed to have difficulty in bringing the doctrine of the Holy Spirit into his theological system; he did not know what to do with it.

The Illumination of Faith. Faith is both an effect and an evidence of regeneration. It is a free gift of

God which He generates within the heart by the operation of His infused grace. Gill understood faith primarily in terms of knowledge. He said:

Faith is a light struck into the heart of a sinner whose understanding was darkened, yea darkness itself, til God commanded light to shine in darkness.⁴⁰

He also said, "Knowledge and faith are joined together as inseparable companions and as expressive of the same thing."⁴¹ What is it then that one must understand in order to be in a state of faith? Briefly, faith consists of knowing the saving purpose of God in Christ, or in a word, it consists of the knowledge of God as Redeemer. This involves something more than merely being aware of God's saving promises; it involves a personal assurance that these promises belong to oneself in particular. Gill explained:

... true faith, in sensible sinners, assents to Christ and embraces Him not merely as a Saviour of men in general; but as a special suitable Saviour for them in particular: it proceeds upon Christ's being revealed in them, as well as to them, by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of Him as Saviour that becomes them; it comes not merely through external teachings, by the hearing of the word from men.⁴²

The important thing, therefore, is the discernment of God's will towards oneself. Whenever it is ascertained that God's attitude is favorable, then one possesses that inner confidence called peace. At this point, the man

⁴⁰Body III, p. 57. ⁴¹Ibid., p. 56. ⁴²Ibid.

of faith resigns himself completely to Christ and acquiesces to Him alone as his Saviour.

A man has received the gift of faith whenever his mind is illumined to the realization of the fact that he is of the elect. Faith enables him to see his eternal status, and it enables him to receive the blessings which were his long before the gift of faith ever came. His eyes are opened to the marvelous good news that he has been justified from eternity and that he has been adopted as a son of God since the beginning of time.

Gill had little use for the traditional interpretation of the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith. He maintained that faith could in no sense be a condition of justification for justification originated in eternity whereas faith originates within time. Faith, indeed, receives and apprehends justification, but this is possible only because it existed prior to faith.⁴³ God does not reckon faith as righteousness. He merely uses it as a means whereby He makes known the fact of justification to the believer. The assurance of justification is subject to varying degrees. When it is said that the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, the meaning is that faith gradually rises to full certainty of justification; the manifestations of it are various and are at

⁴³Gill, Justification, p. 21.

different times, but the act itself is always the same, perfect and complete.⁴⁴

The illumination of faith also reveals the fact of pardon. Though they are very similar, pardon and justification are distinct acts. Pardon is of men who are sinners, but justification consists of pronouncing persons righteous as if they had never sinned.⁴⁵ Pardon takes away the filthy garments, but justification clothes with a change of garments. Pardon frees from punishment, but it does not entitle to everlasting life. Also, pardon lies in the non-imputation of sin, whereas justification lies in the imputation of righteousness; the blood of Christ secured pardon, but it was the holiness of His human nature which secured justification.

Gill stressed the fact that the moving cause of pardon is not penitence. Faith comes first, and penitence follows after it. A man cannot embrace the Gospel by confessing his sins in sorrow. Indeed, it is impossible for a man truly to turn away from his sin unless he already knows through the gift of faith that he belongs to God. However, when God in His goodness reveals the fact of pardon, penitential tears of gratitude are a natural response.

Gill's interpretation of faith and repentance makes

⁴⁴Body II, p. 252.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 230.

a travesty of some of the Scriptural injunctions to "repent and believe."⁴⁶ He was afraid that these would be interpreted to imply the ability of man to have part in his own salvation, but his foremost fear was that they negate his doctrine of the limited atonement by being understood to apply to all men indiscriminately instead of to the elect only. For example, Gill explained that the verse, "Repent, and turn yourselves from your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin," did not refer to inner repentance but to an outward reformation of life.⁴⁷ Similarly, Gill interpreted all general exhortations to faith to refer merely to an external assent to the truth of Christian doctrine.

Sanctification and Perseverance. Sanctification is a gradual work of grace which operates within the heart of a believer and brings him into a state of perfection. It is a process which begins at regeneration and continues until the seed of grace implanted in the soul at that time is brought to final and full fruition. The state of perfection is achieved through the infusion of a living principle of righteousness which turns a man from his trespasses and transforms him into a new creature of true holiness. Believers are accepted as righteous in the act of justification, but through sanctification, they are

⁴⁶See pp.119-124 of this thesis.

⁴⁷Body III, p. 28 (Ezekiel 8:30-32).

actually made righteous. This infusion of righteousness becomes inherent in the life of the believer. It not only makes a man fit for the performance of good works, but, at the same time, it is the source of them. The process of sanctification takes place progressively throughout life, but it becomes more readily evident in some persons than in others. Even in the best of men, sanctification is not fully completed until the moment of glorification, but in so far as it concerns sincerity and truth, all of the saints may be said to be perfect: their faith is unfeigned, their hope is without hypocrisy, and their love without dissimulation.⁴⁸ Since sanctification is necessary for salvation, it is a process experienced by all of the elect. For them it has a twofold importance: it gives evidence to the world of their election and it prepares them for admittance into the presence of God. Before being admitted into the presence of God, however, even the sanctified elect will be subjected to His judgment, but because of their acquired righteousness through God's grace, they have no reason to fear.

Since God completes every good work He begins, the doctrine of sanctification must be coupled with the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. No one whom God has chosen to be saved can ever be lost. Men may choose

⁴⁸Body II, pp. 311-12.

favorites for awhile and later alter their minds and choose others, but not God. He keeps a watchful eye over His own and protects them by His power both within and without. Furthermore, His seed of grace is incorruptible, His decrees are unfrustratable, and His promises are irreversible. Gill reasoned that the doctrine of eternal perseverance is soundly established upon divine perfection. He regarded the very suggestion of falling from grace as a blasphemous reflection against the wisdom, mercy, and faithfulness of God. However, he did concede to the facts of human experience to the extent of admitting that a man might possibly stumble and partially fall, and he granted that God might occasionally see fit to withdraw the evidence of His presence temporarily, but Gill was adamant in insisting that no truly regenerate man could ever totally or finally fall away.

Another reason why Gill championed this doctrine of perseverance was because he believed it to be a comforting doctrine. He felt that it was essential for believers to be assured of their salvation in order to possess peace of mind, and he believed that such assurance was possible. Once this assurance was arrived at, there could then be no cause for distress because of the ultimate inability of any elect person to lapse from grace. But how was this assurance to be obtained? Here is Gill's answer:

... the first question to be put to a man by himself is not, am I elected? but, am I born again? Am I a new creature? am I called by the grace of God and truly converted? If a man can arrive to satisfaction in this matter, he can have no doubt about his election; that then is a clear case and out of all question.⁴⁹

Gill naively assumed that these questions were sufficient to enable a man to ascertain his status before God, but surely, the searching and sensitive soul would find it exceedingly difficult to give an unqualified answer to any one of these questions. Therefore, instead of comfort, the doctrine of eternal perseverance seems equally capable of causing considerable anxiety and distress. It is ironical to realise that the natural response of the uncertain soul would be to try to prove his election by endeavoring to do an abundance of good works to give evidence of it. Thus, in a theological system which unequivocally denies the meritorious value of good works, they come to be highly valued and to occupy a place of paramount importance in the religious outlook of the believer!

The doctrine of perseverance also leaves the door open for just the opposite response. It promises an unqualified security to a believer regardless of what he does or of how he lives. There is a danger that such a promise might encourage moral laxity or create an attitude of in-

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 260.

difference toward any distinction between good and evil. It is conceivable that such a doctrine might give considerable comfort to a man who desires to dabble in the affairs of sin for a season! He could look back upon a past religious experience and soothe his conscience with the assurance that, so long as this lay behind him, nothing else really mattered. This line of reasoning is logical enough in the light of Gill's emphasis upon God's irreversible decrees concerning man's eternal destiny. His extreme emphasis upon the precedence of sovereign law in effecting man's salvation dangerously tends to nullify all lesser laws and to weaken any sense of compulsion man might otherwise have to obey the moral law. Gill recognized these dangers and endeavored to divert them by his definition of Christian liberty.

Christian Liberty. The blessing of Christian liberty endows believers with three fundamental freedoms: (1) freedom from sin, (2) freedom from Satan, and (3) freedom from the bondage of the law.⁵⁰

Freedom from sin does not mean that the believer will henceforth be able to abstain from committing sins. Indeed, in so long as he is in the world he will continue to sin due to the indwelling principle of sin which resides in every man. The meaning is, rather, that he is now released

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 263-64.

from the guilt of sin and from the condemnation of sin. Sin can no longer gain dominion over his life.

He is also freed from the power of Satan. God has dispossessed him from his vassalage to the Prince of Evil, and now he is free to serve in the Kingdom of Christ, though not as a slave but as a son. This new status does not insure immunity from Satan's temptations, but it does guarantee that the believer will not be overcome by temptation or be in danger of destruction by them.

Although Christ has freed the elect from the bondage of the law, He did not revoke the law or declare believers exempt from it as a rule of life. To be sure, the redeemed are released from the condemnation and the curse which were previously attached to the law, but they are nonetheless constrained to live according to it. Their obedience is no longer conditioned by the necessity of justifying themselves before God. They have no legal compulsion to obey it but now desire to obey it voluntarily in order to please Christ. Their indebtedness to Christ imposes upon them the strongest obligation to manifest their gratitude in this way. Because Christ has freed them from the bondage of the law, believers can now obey it with a spirit of cheerfulness. Such a spirit was never possible until the rigors of the law had been touched by the promise of the Gospel. In this new atmosphere, the law is no longer a

grievous and heavy thing to bear. Christ Himself assists them.

The following freedoms also belong to the Christian:

- (1) He is free with respect to all indifferent things which are neither forbidden nor commanded by God, such as mode of dress.
- (2) He is free from all of the traditions of men, such as those contrived by the Roman Church.
- (3) He is free from all rules concerning choice of foods, such as those outlined in the ceremonial law.
- (4) He is free to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience.
- (5) He is free to approach God through the Mediator, Christ.
- (6) He is free from fear of death.⁵¹

III. THE FINAL STATE OF MAN

Characteristically, Gill expounded a complete system of eschatology. He proceeded upon the assumption that all of the apocalyptic literature of the Bible was meant to be taken quite literally, and he assumed that each Biblical writer shared precisely the same eschatological point of view. Therefore, Gill's doctrinal description of final events was an ambitious endeavor to fit together a wide assortment of Scripture into a neatly ordered plan.

Death and Resurrection. Man was originally created

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 264-65.

immortal in both body and soul, but God instituted death as a part of man's punishment for sin. Every form of death is under God's direction; disasters and diseases are His servants.⁵² Death is formidable to nature, yet it should be desired by every good man, for it is far better to depart and be with Christ than to continue in a world of sorrow and sin. The righteous man dies in union with Christ, so he is secure from condemnation and receives the gift of peace in the hour of passing. For him, death is like a refreshing sleep from which he will rise, "lively and active, and more fit for spiritual exercises."⁵³ (Gill did not share the Anabaptist doctrine of soul sleep.)

The two constituent parts of man, his body and his soul, are separated in the moment of death. The soul is "a spiritual substance, immaterial,"⁵⁴ which never dies. The immortality of the soul may be proved by its several powers and faculties: its understanding, will, affections, and its sense of futurity. Immediately after death, there is an individual judgment which determines whether the soul enters a state of happiness or a state of woe. The souls of the righteous return to God to await the resurrection of their bodies and the second coming of Christ, but the souls of the wicked reside in hell.

⁵²Ibid., p. 347. ⁵³Ibid., p. 344. ⁵⁴Ibid., p. 342,
(created ex nihilo).

The resurrection of the body depends upon the sovereign power of God and is a fact which may be known only by the light of revelation. The resurrection has been the faith of the saints for all ages. They will be the first to rise, at the appearance of Christ, but the resurrection of the wicked will not take place until a thousand years thereafter. The resurrected body must consist of the same substance as the earthly body, for, otherwise, (1) a completely different person would be created, (2) the wicked could not be punished in the same body that sinned, and (3) the soul would have to transmigrate.⁵⁵ God, the Great Alchemist, can reclaim all of the elements of the body, and God, the Great Watchmaker, can reassemble them. At this point, Gill's explanation becomes inexcusably crude and understandably confused, but he concluded his discourse with this orthodox statement: "though they will not be changed into spirits, as to substance, they will be spiritual bodies."⁵⁶ Thus, Gill combined the Greek conception of the immortality of the soul with the Hebrew conception of the resurrection of the body.

The Second Coming of Christ.⁵⁷ The time of the second coming of Christ cannot be known with precision, but since

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 389-90.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 391.

⁵⁷Gill explained that Christ has appeared in human nature many times, but this is called the second coming to distinguish it from the Incarnation.

the Bible mentions certain dates and signs, these things should be thoroughly investigated. The first clue to His coming will be the slaying of many saints followed by the destruction of the Antichrist (whom Gill reckoned to be the Pope), and the pouring out of vials of wrath upon all anti-Christian states. After this period of violence has passed, there will be an extended spiritual reign during which many of the Messianic hopes of the prophets will be fulfilled:

... the gospel will be spread everywhere; there will be an open door for it ... knowledge shall be increased ... churches set up according to the gospel in every place; the fulness of the Gentiles will be brought in, and the nation of the Jews born at once. It will be a time of great joy and gladness to the saints.⁵⁸

When all of this has happened, there will next be a period of spiritual indifference, and then the time of Christ's arrival will be near. Gill described all of these events with astonishing detail. The books of Daniel and Revelation were his happy hunting ground.⁵⁹ Although he cautioned against the accuracy of all such predictions, he strongly suggested that the second coming of Christ could be expected in the year 1886!⁶⁰

⁵⁸John Gill, The Watchman's Answer (London, 1750), 4th ed., p. 39.

⁵⁹John Gill, The Sure Performance of Prophecy (London, 1755).

⁶⁰Body II, p. 405.

The purpose of Christ's coming is two-fold: (1) to put the saints into full possession of salvation, and (2) to destroy all of His enemies. He will descend from the third heaven in His human nature, and the agility of His glorious body will be such that He will quickly traverse the earth so that all may see Him. His coming will be accompanied by the conflagration of the earth, the burning of the wicked, and the creation of a completely new heaven and earth. This new earth will be like unto the Paradisical state before the Fall, and the new heaven will have a serene atmosphere, suited to the bodies of raised saints.

Gill was a premillennialist. He believed that Christ will reign personally on the earth for a thousand years. This reign will be bounded by the resurrection of the bodies of the righteous at its beginning and will be terminated by the resurrection of the bodies of the wicked at its close. Satan will be bound during this interval, and there will exist "such a state as can never be imagined." All civil governments will be transferred to Christian hands, and all carnal appetites will give way to pure spiritual pleasures.⁶¹

The Last Judgment. The certainty of judgment is presaged by the accusation of man's natural conscience

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 431-36.

for sin. Christ will judge the righteous during the course of His thousand year reign, and then He will judge the wicked. Gill saw the ambiguity of the dual judgment (first at death and, later, the final judgment), but he reasoned that the last judgment was necessary since it occasioned the reunion of the soul and the body. When the wicked rise, they will make one last desperate effort to save themselves by assaulting the righteous,⁶² but Christ will disperse them quickly and assign them to their ruin. Gill is uncertain as to whether the new earth will be annihilated after the millennium, but he was of the opinion that it "will be a sort of apartment to heaven, whither the saints will pass and repass at their pleasure."⁶³

Heaven and Hell. The existence of heaven may be concluded from man's natural desire for happiness and from the general notion among men of an afterlife. It may also be concluded from the observation of the great injustices on earth and the unequal distribution of the world's good things. If good men were to hope in this life only, they would be of all men most miserable; but God is just. Heaven cannot be described except as it is dimly discerned by faith and hope. In heaven the saints will be completely

⁶²This was Gill's way of accounting for the uprising of Gog and Magog.

⁶³Body II, p. 466.

sanctified in both body and in soul, and they will be free from all temptations and from every adverse circumstance. They will be able to enjoy all good things, to glorify God, to converse with Christ, and to mingle in the society of angels. There will be no gradations of glory in heaven. God's love for all His saints will be exactly the same and will continue so through all eternity.⁶⁴

Gill conceived of both heaven and hell as places rather than simply conditions of existence. He described hell as a place of darkness, horror, and distress. In hell persons will be stripped of every vestige of happiness and subjected to intense suffering, but they will not be destroyed. The punishment that some persons endure will be more painful than that of others, according to the degree of their wickedness, but the worst punishment of all will be their everlasting deprivation of God.⁶⁵

Gill had no conception of realised eschatology. When he thought of last things, he always looked to the future. Indeed, his eschatology kept him so preoccupied with conjectures about coming events that he inculcated an almost negative attitude toward the here and now. He failed to relate his thought of last things to such con-

⁶⁴John Gill, The Glorious State of the Saints in Heaven (London, 1775) 3rd. ed.

⁶⁵Body II, pp. 488-92.

cepts as the Kingdom of God, and he did not consider the blessings conveyed by Christ to be eschatology already in operation. For Gill, the world was a wilderness of wickedness which believers must patiently endure until, finally, their hope of heaven becomes a reality.

CHAPTER VII

A DISSENTER'S DEFENSE

John Gill was unquestionably an uncompromising Dissenter and a convinced Baptist. Yet, in all the bulk of his writings, it is surprising to discover how little he had to say about the relationship of the Dissenter to the Established Church, and it is even more surprising to discover how seldom he spoke about Baptists as such. It is true that all of Gill's writings are interspersed with occasional criticisms of the Established Church, but with the exception of one brief pamphlet, he never dealt with the subject directly. This one pamphlet was entitled, The Dissenters Reasons for Separating from the Church of England.¹ He wrote it in reply to Baptist friends in Wales who wanted information on this subject in order to answer a certain Welsh clergyman who had spoken out against them.

Gill did not feel that it was necessary for him to justify the principle of secession, since the Church of England herself was founded on the basis of this principle,

¹John Gill, The Dissenters Reasons for Separating from the Church of England (London, 1753). (Hereafter referred to as Reasons).

but he did feel called upon to show that his reasons for separation did not arise from a spirit of contention but were grounded in conviction and conscience. Therefore, his defense as a Dissenter may be understood best by a consideration of his own convictions and by paying special attention to those views which he felt were at variance with the position of the Established Church. Gill's objections to the Established Church may be summarized under three general headings: (1) the nature of the Church, (2) the sacraments of the Church, and (3) the relationship of the Church to the State.

I. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

The Invisible Church. Gill conceived of the Church as an invisible fellowship which could be known only through visible congregational churches. The invisible Church comprises all those whom God has predestined to salvation, and the true knowledge of its membership belongs to God alone. His secret election is its foundation. The invisible Church includes the Church militant on earth and the Church triumphant in heaven. Gill defined its inclusiveness as follows:

... all the elect of God that have been, are, or shall be in the world, and who will form the pure, holy and undefiled Jerusalem-Church-State, in which none will be but those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.²

²Body III, p. 226.

The invisible Church is a united Church, and Christ is its sole Head.

Gill did not feel very strongly about the invisible Church. He made only occasional references to it, and sometimes he spoke of it as the "catholic" Church. He seldom used such phrases as "the Body of Christ" or "the Kingdom of God," and he failed to give any precise definition of these phrases. Gill merely quoted all of the familiar theological words which have been associated with the Church traditionally, and he used them interchangeably. He never correlated the meanings of these words to each other, nor did he ever relate his doctrine of the Church to his doctrine of the Redemption. Most of his thought revolved around the simple Protestant doctrine of the Church as a gathered fellowship of believers.

The Church Visible. Gill's primary concern was with the Church as an organizational unit, the local congregation. He maintained that there is no such thing as the visible Church. There are only visible churches. These "particular churches," as he called them, arise in response to the Gospel. The individuals who are regenerated by God's grace are inevitably drawn together into fellowship by their spiritual affinity with each other through Christ. These churches, therefore, are simply social expressions of the spiritual experiences common to a number of Christians.

They are societies of believers. Gill defined a church as follows:

A church is a congregation of men who are gathered out of the world by the grace of God, and who separate from it and meet together in some place to worship God.³

When he spoke of a church, Gill always had in mind a living congregation of people. These congregations are made up of groups of persons who have voluntarily given themselves up to each other and have covenanted together for the enjoyment of certain privileges and the performance of certain duties. Only adult baptized believers may be members of a church. Children are not admitted because they have not yet reached the age of accountability, and they are still in bondage to the corruption of the flesh.

According to Gill, the only valid form of the visible Church is congregational. He based this belief upon an appeal to the authority of the New Testament. He regarded any ecclesiastical structure which could not be illustrated by the Bible as not simply suspect but as ipso facto wrong. He assumed that the form of church organization found in the New Testament was meant to be final and that there was no need for any further development from New Testament beginnings. Therefore, Gill had no use for ecclesiastical

³Reasons, p. 88.

rules confirmed by church councils or for practices instituted through tradition. He was unwilling to acknowledge any standard of guidance in church affairs other than the Scripture itself. In taking this position, Gill expressed a strong Baptist sentiment. Baptists have always insisted that the Church can add nothing to what is already contained within Scripture, and that, at the most, the experience of the ages can only give further elucidation of the Biblical text. It is significant that Gill was so adamant in voicing this point of view, for few other Baptist scholars have been as familiar with the writings of the Church Fathers or have revered them more highly. He said:

The writings of the best of men, of the most early antiquity and of the greatest learning and piety, cannot be admitted by us as the rule and standard of our faith. These, with us, are only the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments: to these we appeal, and by these only can we be determined.⁴

The appeal to antiquity failed to impress Gill unless it was incorporated within the Biblical witness itself. His study of Church history had convinced him that error followed closely at the heels of truth and that corruption, both in doctrine and in practice, was brought into the Christian Church at a very early date.

The basis of church organization, then, was one

⁴Cause, p. 220.

reason why Gill could not be a member of the Church of England. He deplored its Constitution, which he regarded as a human invention. He objected to the phrase "established by law" on the grounds that it was blasphemous to imply that the Church was founded upon the laws of men instead of upon the law of God.⁵ Gill could not understand how the Church of England could call herself "a congregation of faithful men,"⁶ and at the same time claim to be the Church made up of an entire nation, for "if it is a congregation, then it must be gathered out from others ... and meet in one place."⁷ He also wondered how it could claim to be the visible Church of England, for "when was in ever seen in body together?"⁸ Therefore, Gill concluded, to be correct, one must speak of the churches of England.

Gill also condemned the Established Church for not regarding the New Testament as the exclusive source of guidance in matters of church polity and doctrine. He not only believed that the New Testament principles were superior to any others, but also that they were divinely intended for use in their precise New Testament form. He denied the right of any church to evolve its own standards. He maintained that instead

⁵Reasons, p. 88.

⁶Article 19 of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England.

⁷Reasons, p. 88.

⁸Ibid.

of exerting its authority over the interpretation of the New Testament, the Church should submit to the New Testament authority. This distinction is rather hard to grasp, especially in the light of the articles for faith and practice which Gill drew up for his own congregation. It would seem that he has substituted his own authority in the place of the authority of the Church which he professed to deplore! He would insist, of course, that the difference lay in the fact that his articles were based upon the New Testament! Gill was unable to appreciate the following distinction made by an Anglican clergyman in reply to him:

We readily affirm ... that the whole of Christianity is in the New Testament. But we dare not add, 'consequently, whatever is not in the New Testament is no part of Christianity.'⁹

Another Anglican answered:

You expect all the usages of the church, now arrived at maturity, and widely extended, to conform to the practices of an infant society struggling with persecution: which is just as reasonable as to expect a person grown to man's estate to be dressed in swaddling clothes, because that attire was found most convenient for him when a babe.¹⁰

This was precisely what Gill expected, though he denied the validity of the analogy.

⁹R. Hart, Dr. Gill's Reasons for Separating from the Church of England, Calmly Considered (London, 1801), p. 38.

¹⁰S. Cobbold, A Reply to the Dissenter's Reasons for Separating from the Church of England (London, 1804), p. 28.

An Organized Society. How then should a church be organized? In the first place, there must be a sufficient number of persons who desire to covenant together. Gill felt that there must be at least a minimum of six persons, for a smaller group would have difficulty in arbitrating disputes between members.¹¹ Nor should the membership be too large. A church should consist of no more persons than can meet together in one place where all can hear. If ever this number is exceeded, the congregation should divide.

The seat of church government lies in a particular congregation. The majority will of the group has exclusive powers of jurisdiction over the affairs of its members, and each congregation is strictly autonomous. There is no binding power between churches, nor is there any hierarchical structure beyond the local congregation. Gill made no mention of associational meetings with other churches or of sending "messengers" to inter-church assemblies.

The officers of a church may be divided into two classes, the extraordinary and the ordinary. The extraordinary offices were peculiar to the original New Testament situation due to their direct proximity to Christ or to His associates. This class includes (1) the apostles, (2) the prophets, and (3) the evangelists. The apostles were preachers who personally received their commission

¹¹Body III, p. 241.

from Christ Himself. The prophets were men who were inspired with exceptional gifts which enabled them to interpret the Word of God to the infant churches founded by the apostles. And the evangelists were companions of the apostles who assisted them in their work and went from church to church with messages from them. All three of these offices are now extinct.

Since the New Testament era, the ordinary officers have been only pastors and deacons, (despite the fact that "the Antichrist has introduced a rabble of other officers which the Scripture knows nothing of.")¹² The principal officer of a church is the pastor. In the New Testament, he is referred to by many different names: bishop, elder, presbyter, and teacher. In each case, the same office is intended. The pastor is called to his task by the inward voice of God, but he is called to a particular church by the members of a given congregation. He must be a member of the church in which he serves, and he should be ordained before he serves. The pastor's primary responsibility is to explain and defend the doctrines of the Gospel and to exhort his people to observe its practical implications. He is responsible for the spiritual welfare of every person in the church, and he is expected to lead the church with God-given guidance.

¹²Ibid.

The office of a deacon lies chiefly in the management of temporal things rather than spiritual things. His duties are related to (1) the Lord's Table, (2) the pastor's table, and to (3) the table of the poor.¹³ Whenever the Lord's Supper is observed, the deacons should assist the pastor in distributing the elements to the congregation. They should also assist the pastor by putting before the congregation his personal needs, for the deacons are responsible for the pastor's proper maintenance. Finally, it is the task of the deacons to keep informed about the needs of the poor and to see to it that no member of the congregation is ever in material want. The number of deacons in a church varies according to the size of the congregation, but regardless of how small a church may be, at least one or two deacons are needed.

Gill was criticized for formulating such a simple outline of ecclesiastical offices on the basis of Scripture. One clergyman accused him of copying Scripture only in so far as his inclination led him and no further.¹⁴ Gill argued, however, that his simple uniform plan of ecclesiastical government was the only one which could be delineated from the New Testament. (Of course the New Testament plan does become remarkably simple once it is granted that the

¹³Ibid., p. 270.

¹⁴Cobbold, pp. 27-29.

office of a pastor has so many synonymous titles and that apostles, prophets, and evangelists are purely extraordinary!) It should be clear, Gill thought, that "a church of Christ ought to be constituted as those we read of in the Acts of the Apostles and not established by the acts of Parliament."¹⁵

A Disciplined Fellowship. A church is made up of persons who are called to be saints and who gradually become saints within its fellowship. Therefore, reasoned Gill, since the Church of England comprises a nation of sinful men, and since it indiscriminately admits members at birth (many of whom grow up to be wicked), the Church of England cannot be called a true church. A church must be kept pure, and this can be done in two ways: (1) by a careful screening of those who are accepted as members, and (2) by a vigilant weeding out of those who prove to be unfit. The Church Record Book of Gill's congregation bears witness to the fact that he practiced both these principles in his own congregation. Whenever anyone requested membership, a committee was sent to investigate the candidate and to determine the validity of his spiritual testimony. Gill cautioned:

Except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, of the grace of the Spirit of God, he cannot enter, of right he ought not to enter, and, if known,

¹⁵Reasons, p. 88.

ought not be allowed to enter into the kingdom of God.¹⁶

Similarly, whenever a member stepped out of line, he was called before the church to confess his behavior or else he was dismissed. Any person discovered to be either morally or doctrinally impure was readily rejected. Also, persons who failed to attend the services regularly or who disturbed the peace of the church were liable to excommunication. By "excommunication" Gill meant:

... a removal of a man from the communion of the church, and from all privileges dependent upon it; it is a disfranchising him from all of the immunities of a fellow-citizen with the saints, and taking from him a place and a name in the house of God; for a church can take no more from him than what it first gave him.¹⁷

Members were withdrawn from the congregation by the majority will of the church, and they were removed (1) to glorify God, (2) to purify the church, and (3) to encourage the guilty party to renounce his wrongdoing.¹⁸

An Anglican rector, who became riled over Gill's insinuations about the moral quality of the membership of the Established Church, anonymously pointed out to him the falsity of his assumption that all natives of England were members of the State Church by virtue of their birth; it is only through baptism. He also quoted some pertinent

¹⁶Body III, p. 229.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 285.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 286.

passages from the letters of Paul to show that wicked members were found even in New Testament churches, the churches which Gill persisted in calling "the churches of the saints."¹⁹

A Worshipping Community. The various groups of Dissenters differed with the Established Church on different points of doctrine, but they all agreed in their dislike of the Anglican service of worship. Of course they believed that the Church should be a worshipping community, but they insisted that its service should be simple, straightforward, and informal. Such a service was not to be found in the Church of England.

Gill's dislike of the Church's liturgy was complete. He had no use for the Prayer Book because it was composed of "vain repetitions". Furthermore, it made the service inexcusably complex; it encased the Spirit in cold collects and punctuated the prayers with disorderly responses. He objected to the use of the rigid schedule of services comprising the Church Year and also to the prescribed readings of Scripture from Sunday to Sunday. He deplored the use of the Apocrypha, and he considered the sign of the cross and the custom of bowing at the mention of the name of Jesus to be acts of sheer superstition. As for

¹⁹ [] Rector in the Diocese of Bath and Wells, A Letter to Dr. Gill, author of Dissenter's Reasons (London, 1805), pp. 20-22.

clerical garments, they might not be intrinsically wrong, but he could find no Scriptural justification for wearing them. Gill decided what was suitable for worship on the basis of the following principle. He regarded any accessory to worship which was neither sanctioned nor prohibited by the Bible as indifferent, meaning neither good nor bad; but, if indifferent, such accessories should not be incorporated in a service lest they become an imposition upon those who might dislike them.

Most of the rites and ceremonies of the Established Church were held in great disdain by Gill, for he felt that they were either manifestly pagan in origin or else were relics of Popery. He considered the celebration of Church festivals monstrously heathen, and he thought that Church weddings were the height of impropriety. He was sure that the service of consecrating burial grounds and the rite of administering absolution to the sick were influences from Rome. Gill possessed an amazing facility for detecting Popery in the Established Church. He was never quite certain just where the Reformation line of division had been drawn, but he assumed that whatever savored of Rome was unquestionably of the devil.

The same rector who rebuked Gill anonymously for his accusations concerning the morality of the membership of the Church of England also rebuked him for his blind abhorrence of Popery, which he regarded as dangerous in

indiscreet hands. He wrote:

I deem the perfection of civil or religious reformation to consist in moderation. You think nothing excellent which is not extreme. -- I would relieve the ancient Church of Rome of her gaudy and ill assorted ornaments; with a light and soothing hand would disembarass her of her cumbrous oppressive drapery; -- you with rude grasp, would rip off every garment, and in your haste and harshness, lacerate the slain with the vest.²⁰

New Testament simplicity -- not moderation -- was Gill's directive for worship. He had absolutely no appreciation for the forms of and aids to worship which the Church had evolved through the ages. For him these were just so many accretions which should be stripped away, lest the Spirit be stifled by the mechanics of the service.

II. BATTLE OVER BAPTISM

Background of the Controversy. Baptism by immersion was brought into England among Particular Baptists about 1641.²¹ Wherever the practice was introduced, it caused considerable controversy, much of which was heated in spirit. Baptists always found themselves on the defensive, but despite the abuse levelled against them, they persisted in their point of view and voiced it without apology. By so doing, the practice spread, but controversy inevitably

²⁰Ibid., pp. 95-96.

²¹See pp. 20-21 of this thesis.

accompanied it. Irate Churchmen said, "You Anabaptists are baptizing people who have been baptized before. This is sacrilege, for a man can be baptized only once." "No," said the Baptist, "your infant baptism, or rather sprinkling, is no baptism, and therefore, they have not been baptized before." Then the pamphlet war began!

It was a pamphlet written against the practice of immersion which first prompted Gill into the field of public controversy. In 1726, an independent minister, Mr. Matthew Maurice of Rowel, Northamptonshire, published a piece which he called, The Manner of Baptizing with Water, Cleared Up from the Word of God and Right Reason.²² The Baptists from Gill's native Kettering prevailed upon him to answer Maurice, which Gill did in a pamphlet entitled, The Ancient Mode of Baptism by Immersion.²³ This marked the beginning of a controversy which really never ended. Repeatedly, Gill was called upon to reply on behalf of the Baptists, and by the end of his life he had written a whole series of articles on the issue. The most important ones were the following :

- 1727 - The Ancient Mode of Baptism by Immersion.
- 1749 - The Divine Right of Infant Baptism Examined.
- 1751 - The Argument from Apostolic Tradition.
- 1753 - Infant Sprinkling, an Innovation.

²²Matthew Maurice, The Manner of Baptizing with Water Cleared Up from the Word of God and Right Reason (London, 1726).

²³John Gill, The Ancient Mode of Baptism by Immersion (London, 1727). (Hereafter referred to as Ancient Mode).

- 1765 - Baptism a Divine Commandment to be Observed.
 1766 - Infant Baptism, Part and Pillar of Popery.
 1770 - The Baptism of Jewish Proselytes.

The calibre of Gill's opponents varied considerably. His most formidable opposition came from a minister in New England, the Reverend Peter Clark, who once answered Gill with a book consisting of over four hundred pages, some of which were irrelevant to the controversy. This attack came when Gill was in the midst of his Biblical commentary, so he replied that he did not have enough time to completely "cleanse that Augean stable and remove all the dirt and rubbish this writer has collected together."²⁴ A number of persons entered the controversy anonymously "like the Indians' manner of fighting, who set up an hideous yell, pop off their guns behind bushes and hedges, and then run away and hide themselves in the thickets."²⁵ Inevitably, Gill repeated himself constantly, for every renewal of the controversy involved covering much of the same ground all over again. At times Gill gave evidence of being genuinely tired of thrashing out the issue, but he summed up his feelings about the matter as follows:

... if we reply to what is written against us, then we are litigious persons and lovers of controversy;

²⁴John Gill, A Reply to Mr. Clark's Defense of the Divine Right of Infant-Baptism (Boston, 1754), p. 5. (Hereafter referred to as Reply to Clark).

²⁵John Gill, Baptism a Divine Commandment to be Observed (London, 1765), p. iv. (Hereafter referred to as Commandment).

... and if we make no reply, then what is written is unanswerable, and we are triumphed over.²⁶

Lest anyone should consider the Baptists beaten, answers from Gill were always forthcoming!

Statement of the Baptist Position (as understood by Gill). Baptism is a preliminary requirement for church membership. Strictly speaking, it is not a church ordinance since it takes place outside the church. It is a preparatory rite which does not guarantee a person's being accepted by a church but qualifies him to apply for church membership. Of course a church is always concerned to know whether a person has been properly baptized before he is accepted into the fellowship, but the actual Rite of Baptism is performed by an administrator who has sole authority to decide whom he will baptize. Any person who desires to unite with a church must first request baptism from an administrator, and only then is he in a position to make application for admittance into a church.²⁷ It is conceivable that a church may not always concur with the administrator in deciding to accept everyone whom he has baptized; therefore, there is a possibility that a person may receive baptism without ever being received into a congregation! (This is a position that many Baptists today would renounce, for usually a person is

²⁶John Gill, The Argument from Apostolic Tradition (London, 1753), 2nd ed., p. 4. (Hereafter referred to as Apostolic Tradition).

²⁷Body III, p. 228.

first accepted by the congregation as a candidate for baptism. Furthermore, the minister is nearly always the administrator.).

Before administering the Rite of Baptism, the administrator should make sure that the person requesting it has experienced a work of grace. Only those who have been enlightened by the Spirit to see themselves as sinners and to see Christ as their Saviour should be baptized. They must be prepared to give public evidence of their faith and of their repentance, both to the administrator and to the church. The ordinance is not confined to any particular age group. Whether a person be young or old, if he can give proof of his faith, he should be granted baptism.

... if a little child is called by grace and converted, and gives reason of the hope that's in it, of which there have been instances: such will not be refused the ordinance of baptism.²⁸

Although baptism is not a church ordinance, it is an ordinance of God. The strongest obligation rests upon every believer to submit to this rite because it is commanded by God in Holy Scripture. Thus, the ordinance is primarily an act of obedience to a divine command.²⁹ By being baptized, a person acquires a good conscience for

²⁸Reply to Clark, p. 78.

²⁹See Commandment.

having obeyed God.

Baptism is in no sense essential for salvation.³⁰ The baptismal water possesses no regenerating power. Neither the remission of sins nor the cleansing from sins is achieved by it. However, the ordinance does comfort a person with the sufferings, death, and blood of Christ, which are represented in it. Obviously, baptism is not necessary to salvation, for the Old Testament saints, who were never baptized, have certainly been saved! And "no doubt many now are saved who never were baptized with water at all."³¹ In referring to baptism, Baptists use the word ordinance instead of the word sacrament, for the latter tends to suggest that the act of performing the rite effects some change within the person who receives it. Such a change is effected only by the blood of Christ, explained Gill. Baptism is merely the distinguishing badge worn by those in whom this change has been wrought. (The whole sacramental concept is anathema to the Baptist mind.).

Baptism cannot be administered rightly except by immersion. It is improper to speak of immersion as a "mode of baptism," for it is baptism itself.³² The Bible bears

³⁰When Gill's little girl was dying, he assured her that she had no cause to worry for not having been baptized. See A Sermon on Death of Elizabeth Gill (London, 1738).

³¹Apostolic Tradition, p. 13.

³²Body III, p. 317.

witness to this fact in both the Old and the New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the figurative baptisms of the flood and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea can suggest no other manner:

Theirs was at their first entrance upon their journey to Canaan, as ours is, when in a way of profession, we publicly begin our Christian race. They, when they came out of it, could sing and rejoice in the view of all their enemies being destroyed; as the believer also can in this ordinance, in the view of all his sins being drowned in the sea of Christ's blood: witness the instances of the eunuch and the jailor. But in nothing is there a greater resemblance between them than in their descending into it, and coming up out of it, which is very much expressive of the mode of baptism by immersion.³³

In the New Testament, the word βαπτίζω unquestionably means "to dip" or "to plunge," and the letters of Paul make clear the fact that baptism was intended to represent the death, burial, and the Resurrection of Christ. This symbolism becomes meaningless apart from immersion. It also symbolizes the washing away of sins and the rising to a newness of life.

The Baptist understanding of baptism leaves no room for the baptism of infants. For this reason, Baptists have often been called "Antipaedobaptists," meaning (1) those who oppose infant baptism and (2) those who insist that baptism by immersion is the only valid form. Gill's objections to infant baptism were many. He did

³³Ancient Mode, p. 72.

not oppose it because of any doubting of God's ability to effect a work of grace upon the soul of an infant, but because he believed that the New Testament prescribed believers immersion only and that this must be attested by a profession of faith. Obviously, infants could have no understanding of the nature, design, or use of this ordinance. Nor are they capable of declaring their faith or repentance. Gill reasoned that all infants who are baptized could not possibly have faith, since so many of them are manifestly destitute of it when they grow up, and since the gift of grace can never be lost once it has been given. He regarded baptizing a child as exceedingly precarious if it were based upon a supposed or embryonic faith -- far better to defer eligibility for baptism until there can be no doubt that the child truly and actually believes.

Infant baptism also robs the child of the privilege of obeying this divine commandment. Submitting to the Rite of Baptism is something that no one can do for anyone else. Neither proxies, nor sureties, or parents have the right to "dedicate" a child to God, for the child is ignorant of the whole transaction. Dedication to God is something that every person must do for himself. In the first place, baptism is not a service of dedication. Rightly considered, dedication should precede baptism.

Furthermore, infant baptism seems to imply a false urgency about baptism as if it accomplished something ultimate. It is true that the infants of believers are by nature children of wrath and under condemnation through the Covenant of Works, but baptism is not what saves them. Nor does baptism initiate children into the privileges of the Covenant, for those who are thus blessed have been chosen from eternity. Baptism does not effect regeneration, does not put one in a capacity to receive salvation, nor does it induce an inner work of grace; it is merely an outward sign. Since salvation belongs to the Lord alone, the judicious parent should leave this matter with Him; and in the event of a child's death before baptism, he should put his hope in the mercy of God through Christ, for it is He who saves.

Finally, infant sprinkling is falsely called baptism. Only immersion bears witness to the symbolism baptism was designed to show. Baptism is not a sign of the pouring out the Holy Spirit or of the sprinkling of the blood of Christ. It is a sign of Christ's death, burial, and Resurrection. "Will any man in his senses say that a corpse is buried when only a little dust or earth is sprinkled or poured on its face?"³⁴ Pouring and sprinkling are Papist innovations!

Those who practiced infant sprinkling raised every

³⁴Commandment, p. 25.

conceivable argument against Gill's doctrine of Baptism. The arguments which recurred most frequently are considered in the paragraphs which follow.

The Argument from Propriety and Practicality.

Baptism by immersion has always been offensive to many persons who have a strong sense of propriety. They regard it as an awkward rite -- sometimes scandalous -- and point out that it is not a practicable mode of baptism due to the special facilities needed for its observance. In the light of these facts, would not infant sprinkling be preferred?

In so far as Gill was concerned, these considerations were completely beside the point. He was convinced that the Bible taught immersion, and if this were the case, no man has the authority to introduce a different mode. Admittedly, lack of facilities may sometimes present a problem, but rivers and lakes are usually available; and if not, then artificial pools should be constructed. These "little holes or tubs,"³⁵ as Gill's opponents persisted in calling them, were favorite subjects for satire. Some of his opponents suggested that immersion was indiscreetly practiced in intimate privacy, whereas others levelled the accusation that it was indecently performed in public.

³⁵The first meeting-house supplied with a baptistry was built in Horsly-down in 1657. Whitby, Baptists of London (Kingsgate Press, London, 1929), p. 16.

Scandalous insinuations like the one below were in common circulation:

... can we therefore imagine that Christ's baptism should intrench so much upon the laws of civility, chastity, and modesty, as to require women and maids to appear openly in the light of the sun, out of their wanted habit, in transparent and thin garments, next to nakedness, and in that posture be took by a man in his arms, and plunged in the face of the whole congregation, before men and boys!³⁶

Gill replied to such charges in kind. Adequate "plunging garments" were always worn, he said, and the service was solemnly observed before a large company of "spectators" -- not "as some other performances commonly are: in a lying-in chamber, and that in the presence of a midwife, a nurse, and two or three gossiping women!"³⁷ Further:

There are many that will go into baths and plunge themselves in them for pleasure and profit, to refresh their bodies, or cure them of disorders; but if plunging in water is directed to, as an ordinance of God, then it is a grievous thing ...³⁸

What about baptizing people in the depth of winter? "Why not?" asked Gill in reply. If this is an ordinance of God, no danger is likely to come from it. As for the sick and infirm, "perhaps it may be of use to them for

³⁶J.P. and B.W., The Manner of Baptizing with Water (London, 1726), p. 44.

³⁷Ancient Mode, p. 41.

³⁸Commandment, p. 30.

the re-establishment of health."³⁹

Several of those who objected to immersion argued that the manner of baptism really did not matter in view of the fact that, according to Gill's own statement, it has no saving quality. One said:

... if the salutary nature of baptism consists not in the outward rite itself, how much less in the particular mode?⁴⁰

But the particular mode is commanded in Scripture, Gill reminded. Therefore, men must obey.

The Argument from Scripture. The arguments which demanded Gill's most serious consideration were those which attempted to prove that infant baptism could be substantiated by Scripture. Gill was convinced that his doctrine of believer's baptism had a firm Biblical foundation, and he defied those who opposed him to disprove it. The supporters of infant baptism endeavored to do so by quoting the following verses:⁴¹

1. Matthew 19:14 - "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Gill's explanation: In the first place,

³⁹Ancient Mode, p. 76.

⁴⁰(Brekel), Paedobaptism, or a Defense of Infant Baptism in Point of Antiquity (London, 1753), p. 77.

⁴¹See Body III, pp. 294-306 for concise summary.

this is not a command but a permissive injunction. In the second place, it is not probable that new born babes would be abroad in such a crowd. Jesus may have called them to Him in order to place His hands on their heads for prayer. They may even have been diseased children whom he desired to heal by His touch. Surely, if infant baptism had been a custom, the apostles would never have rebuked them for coming to Jesus but would have brought them to Him! The purpose of the incident may have been merely metaphorical. Jesus wanted to compare the attributes needed for the kingdom of God with those possessed by a little child.

2. Matthew 28:19 - "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them ..." Gill's explanation: The baptism of all nations is not here commanded, but only the baptism of those who are taught. Teaching must always precede baptism, but infants are unable to learn anything.

3. Acts 2:41 - "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized ... about three thousand souls." Gill's explanation: There is no reason to believe that there were any children in this crowd; nor is there any indication that all of these persons were baptized in one day. In any event, this would not have been an insurmountable task, for nearby Jewish baths would have provided ample facilities, and, with the twelve disciples acting as ad-

ministrators, each would have had only two hundred and fifty persons apiece to baptize.

4. Acts 16:15, 33; I Corinthians 1:16 - "And when she was baptized, and her household ..." Gill's explanation: There are families in which there are no infants. How can anyone be sure that there were infants in these?

5. I Corinthians 7:14 - "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife ... else were your children unclean." Gill's explanation: Covenant privileges are not conveyed by natural generation. If a child should have a claim to baptism by virtue of his family relationship, why should not the unbelieving partner? The inference is that the couple should remain together so that the children will not be declared illegitimate.

Other verses brought into the controversy by Gill were:

6. John 3:23 - "And John also was baptizing in Aenon ... because there was much water there." This site would not have been chosen had the practice been infant sprinkling.

7. Acts 8:38, 39 - "... and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water ..." What other circumstances could have occasioned their

going down into (εἰς) the water and coming up out of (ἀπο) the water except the rite of immersion? And here, as in every other instance where the word baptized is used, the Greek word is βαπτίζω, meaning "to dip" or "to plunge."

8. Romans 6:4 - "We are buried with him by baptism into death" Here Christ's sufferings are represented by going down into the water, and by being overwhelmed in it; his burial by a short continuance under it, and being covered with it; and His Resurrection by an emergence out of it.

After a careful consideration of the Biblical evidence, Gill concluded:

... if it (infant baptism) is of divine right, it is of God; and if it is of God, if it is according to his mind, and is instituted and appointed by him, it must be notified |from| where or other in his word; wherefore the Scriptures must be searched into, to see whether it is so, or no; and upon the most diligent search that can be made, it will be found that there is not the least mention of it in it; that there is no precept enjoining it, or directing the observance of it; nor any instance, example, or precedent encouraging such a practice, nor any thing there said or done, that gives any reason to believe it is the will of God that such a rite should be observed; wherefore it will appear to be entirely an human invention, and as such to be rejected.⁴²

same ?

⁴²John Gill, The Divine Right of Infant Baptism Examined (London, 1749), p. 2. (Hereafter referred to as Divine Right.)

The Argument from Tradition. Gill regarded the appeal to apostolic tradition as an acknowledgement of the fact that infant baptism could not be found in Scripture, for why should anyone be concerned with traditions if the doctrine can be upheld by the Bible?

... if it can be proved by Scripture, that's enough; it has then no need of traditions; but if it can't be proved by that, a cart-load of traditions will not support it: this puts me in mind of what I have heard, of a countryman offering to give the judge a dozen reasons why his neighbor could not appear in court; 'in the first place, my lord,' says he, 'he is dead'; 'that's enough' quoth the judge, 'I shall spare you the trouble of giving me the rest ...'⁴³

What if the Fathers could be quoted to prove infant baptism? This would simply show how soon corruption seeped into the Church!

Nevertheless, Gill did not brush aside the evidence from tradition without investigating it. Indeed, he was thoroughly familiar with the Fathers and was as competent as any one of his opponents in quoting from them. His study left him assured that the appeal to tradition was at best shaky. His findings were as follows:⁴⁴

1. There is not the least mention of infant baptism in the writings of the first century. Clemens, Polycarp, and Papias are all strangely silent about the matter. If

⁴³Apostolic Tradition, p. 7.

⁴⁴Ibid.

infant baptism were an apostolic tradition, it would seem that someone should have known by whom it was delivered, or to whom it was delivered, or when and where the authorization for the rite was granted.

2. The two second century passages quoted in support of infant baptism are by no means clear. The first is from Justin Martyr who said, "Several persons among us, men and women, of sixty and seventy years of age, who from their childhood were instructed in Christ" (οἱ ἐκ παιδῶν μαθητεύθησαν τῷ Χριστῷ). This excerpt has been falsely translated "proselyted to Christ" whereas the word μαθητευθῆναι is used by Justin in other connections to refer to teaching. The second passage is from Irenaeus who wrote, "He (Christ) came to save all; all I say, who by him are born again unto God, infants and little ones (qui per eum renascuntur in Deum). The word renascor can never be rendered "baptized." It should also be noted that some scholars consider this section from Irenaeus to be of spurious origin.

3. The first definite reference to infant baptism is in the third century writings of Tertullian, and he opposed it!

Gill considered all subsequent writings, such as those of Origen, Cyprian, and Dionysius to be of little consequence, for he readily admitted that by the middle

of the third century the practice of infant baptism had begun to be established as orthodox. He judged the period from the fourth century to the Reformation to be a time in which the true Church of Christ gradually disappeared.⁴⁵

Gill was not bothered by the fact that the practice of adult immersion had no unbroken tradition behind it. Christ did not promise that there would be a continued succession of visible congregational churches, but there have been witnesses for the Baptist belief in nearly every age. The Waldensians were pre-Reformation baptizers, and the Lollards of England were spiritual kinsmen since they questioned the validity of infant sprinkling.⁴⁶ It is true that the English Antipaedobaptists sent messengers to foreign countries to receive baptism so that they would be qualified to administer the rite in Britain when they returned, but their desire to be baptized abroad arose from no concern for apostolic succession. After all, John the Baptist was an unbaptized administrator of the rite. Wherever there is no baptized person to administer the ordinance, it is permissible for two persons to baptize each other.⁴⁷

If any credence is given to apostolic traditions,

⁴⁵Divine Right, p. 11.

⁴⁶Ibid, p. 25.

⁴⁷Ibid, p. 17.

who is to decide which practices should be accepted and which ones should be rejected? There is a whole cluster of associated practices which the Fathers mention in connection with baptism: infant-communion, the sign of the cross, renouncing the devil by exorcism, triune immersion, the consecration of the water, anointing with oil, and giving a mixture of honey and milk to newly baptized persons.⁴⁸ If infant baptism is received on the basis of tradition, all of these other practices should be adopted for the same reason. In the final analysis, the problem is primarily one of determining the seat of the Church's authority. Is it to be the law of Christ as contained in the Bible, or are men permitted to alter His law and prescribe new ones?

The Argument from Theology. The advocates for infant baptism felt that one of their strongest arguments lay in associating baptism with the Covenant of Grace. Some argued that baptism was the seal of the Covenant, while others maintained that it was an initiatory rite of entry into the Covenant. In either case, they drew a parallel between the Old Testament rite of circumcision and the New Testament practice of baptism. They reasoned that baptism succeeded circumcision, and that, like circumcision,

⁴⁸John Gill, Antipaedobaptism; or Infant Sprinkling an Innovation (London, 1753), pp. 39-40.

baptism should also be administered to infants.

Gill explained that the above arguments were based upon an erroneous understanding of the Covenant relationship. Only Adam and Christ are Covenant Heads, not Abraham. The natural seed of Adam inherit the Covenant of Works and the spiritual seed of Christ inherit the Covenant of Grace. The covenant made with Abraham was of a mixed nature. It promised temporal blessings to his natural seed and spiritual blessings to his spiritual seed, but it definitely did not promise the blessings of grace to all his posterity.⁴⁹ The rite of circumcision was instituted as a national sign to distinguish the descendants of Abraham from those of other nations. It was not a covenant seal. If circumcision had been a covenant seal, all those who lived between Adam and Abraham would have been left out. Also, it could not have been a covenant seal since it was confined to Abraham's male seed only. Furthermore, if it had been a covenant seal, then all of Abraham's pagan descendants must be considered within the Covenant merely by virtue of their natural generation from him. (Gill failed to recognise the fact that Abraham's pagan descendants were cast off by apostasy.) Neither circumcision nor baptism are covenant seals. They are signs. The former was a national sign which separated the Jews from other peoples, and the latter is a spiritual sign which

⁴⁹Divine Right, p. 48.

separates believers from unbelievers. Clearly, baptism did not take the place of circumcision, for baptism was introduced before circumcision was abolished.⁵⁰

A child does not come into the Covenant by baptism. This is something which is in no way conditioned by any act of man. It is not dependant upon the parents or the minister; nor is it dependant upon the rite of sprinkling water. Admittance into the Covenant is an act of God, and this was accomplished long before baptism, even before the beginning of time. Only those who are included within the Covenant should be granted baptism, and infants are incapable of discerning their Covenant status.

After having heard these arguments repeatedly, and after having answered them again and again, Gill prefixed to one of his final pamphlets the following observation:

... they seem as if they are not satisfied with what has been done on their side; and therefore are always attempting either to put the controversy upon a new foot, or to throw the old arguments into a new form; and even say the same things over and over again, to make their minds and the minds of their people easy, if possible.⁵¹

It is true that the proponents of infant baptism were the aggressors in this controversy in nearly every case.

⁵⁰John Gill, An Answer to a Welch Clergyman's Twenty Arguments in Favor of Infant Baptism (Attached to Argument from Apostolic Tradition), pp. 58-59.

⁵¹Apostolic Tradition, p. 3.

III. THE CHURCH ORDINANCES

There are four Church ordinances: (1) the Lord's Supper, (2) the ministry of the Word, (3) the singing of hymns, and (4) prayer. Baptism is also usually listed as an ordinance of the Church, but it is more correctly understood as an ordinance of God which precedes church membership and takes place outside the Church.

The Lord's Supper. The ordinance of the Lord's Supper is a memorial meal and a spiritual feast. It commemorates the sufferings and sacrifice of Christ and calls to remembrance the love of the Father in providing His Son as a burnt-offering for the sins of His people.⁵² The memory of those who receive the Lord's Supper is quickened by the vivid symbols used. The broken bread symbolizes Christ's broken body, and the wine represents the shedding of His sacred blood. The Lord's Supper is a feast of faith. Before one partakes of this feast, he should examine himself to see if he has true faith in Christ, for unless those who participate believe in Christ, they cannot discern His presence in the Supper. It is by faith that Christ dwells in the hearts of the communicants, and it is by faith that they live in Him and by Him. Believers become one in spirit with Him and they

⁵²John Gill, Attendance in Places of Religious Worship (London, 1757), p. 37.

have both union and communion with Him; there is a mutual indwelling. Christ participates in the Supper by making the believers mindful of the blessings of grace which He has made available for them, and whoever receives the bread and wine in faith, experiences His holy presence. Thus, the bread and the wine become spiritual food for the support and the maintenance of life.⁵³

Gill considered the observance of the Lord's Supper a solemn occasion, for when believers meditate upon the meaning of the sacred symbols, they enter into the fellowship of Christ's suffering. The pouring out of the wine into the cup confronts the communicant with a picture of Christ's pouring out His blood unto death, and the bread

is not a symbol of this body as living either on earth or in heaven, but as dead ... but as crucified, suffering, slain, ... for in it Christ is evidently set forth before the eye of faith, as crucified, and to Him as such believers are directed to look, whom they have pierced, and mourn ...⁵⁴

When believers see the dreadful consequences of their sins, they are prone to be sad. Yet, even in their sadness, they find comfort, for they know that the blessings of grace flow from the sufferings of Christ. The solemnity of the Supper is also occasioned by the communicant's realization that through this rite he attests his love

⁵³Body, III, pp. 315-28.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 318.

for Christ. Moreover, the Supper is a time when all the members of a church pledge their love and loyalty to one another.

Only baptized believers should be privileged to partake of the Lord's Supper. These should be members of the particular church in which the ordinance is observed, and the pastor of the church is the proper person to administer it. Christians ought to observe the ordinance frequently, but care should be taken to prevent any unqualified person from participating. Gill accused the Church of England of administering the Lord's Supper indiscriminately to anyone who desired it. He substantiated this charge by pointing to the Test Act which he said profaned the Lord's Supper by making its observance obligatory for even the worst of characters, and for men whose sole interest was personal profit instead of spiritual sustenance.⁵⁵

Gill condemned the Roman Church for its crude theory of transubstantiation and for its refusal to distribute the elements in both kinds. He was also censorious of the Anglican Church, but it is interesting to notice that all of his objections were of a peripheral and picayune nature. Never once did he point to any difference in theo-

⁵⁵Gill's Church Record Book (from September 26, 1737 to February 6, 1738) records six meetings held concerning the disciplining of a Mr. James Hart who had communed with the Church of England in order to comply to the Test Act.

logical interpretation. His concern was about such things as the propriety of using a knife to "break" the bread and the illogic of celebrating a supper in the middle of the day. He objected to kneeling because he believed this position was suggestive of adolstry and dated back to the days of undue adoration of the elements.⁵⁶ He instructed that the elements might be received in a standing position in order to symbolize the readiness of a servant to do his Master's will, but he personally preferred the sitting position since this was a natural table gesture. Said Anglican Cobbold, "If consistent, Gill should celebrate the Lord's Supper in an upper room, reclining."⁵⁷

The Ministry of the Word. For Gill the Scripture was the Word of God, and he considered the minister's most important task to be proclaiming the Word and the mark of a true Church to be pure preaching. He placed almost equal emphasis upon the proper hearing of the Word, for he taught that this was the primary responsibility of church members. He regarded the preaching and hearing of the Word as a reciprocal action which together comprise what he called "the ordinance of the ministry of the Word."⁵⁸

Gill did not think of preaching as a novel activity

⁵⁶Reasons, pp. 93-94.

⁵⁷Cobbold, p. 20.

⁵⁸Body III, p. 328.

peculiar to the New Testament Church. He believed that preaching had been a common activity throughout the Old Testament and that Christ and His salvation had been declared down through the ages, even previous to the Incarnation. The main purpose of the ministry of the Word has always been to gather in all of the elect until the full quota of chosen saints is completed and all the members of Christ's Body are united in His Church.⁵⁹

Although proclaiming the Word is not the efficient cause of regeneration, it is usually the occasion of regeneration, and therefore, it is a minister's main work. He does not proclaim the Word, however, by extending to sinners an invitation to salvation in the name of Christ. A minister does not have the right to do this, for Christ has already been given to the elect and to them alone. Gill said:

Nor is the gospel-ministry an offer of Christ and of his grace and salvation by him, which are not in the power of the ministers of it to give, nor of carnal men to receive; the gospel is not an offer, but a preaching of Christ crucified, a proclamation of the unsearchable riches of his grace.⁶⁰

It behooves men to give their careful attention to the proclamation of the Word, since this is the setting in which men most often discern their eternal status. Even though a man may not be chosen, listening to the

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 328.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 283.

Word is not without profit. By hearing the Word, he becomes more civilized and more reformed in the outward manner of his life. He may also be encouraged to give credit to divine revelation and may even become serviceable to the cause of religion.⁶¹

Since pure preaching characterizes the true Church, Gill reasoned that the Church of England could not be considered as such. He readily admitted that the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church were for the most part agreeable to the Word of God, but he complained that they were generally ignored in the Church's preaching. He judged:

Arminianism has generally prevailed; and scarce any thing else than Arminian tenets and mere morality are preached, and not Christ and him crucified, and the necessity of faith in Him and salvation by Him; wherefore, we are obliged to depart from such a communion, and seek out elsewhere for food for our souls.⁶²

Although Gill judged the theology of the Thirty-nine Articles to be largely right in so far as it went, he found it defective due to its silence or lack of elaboration about the following doctrines:

the two covenants, creation and providence, the fall of man, the nature of sin and its punishment, adoption, effectual vocation, sanctification, faith, repentance, the final perseverance of the saints, Christian liberty, church government and discipline, the communion of the saints, the resurrection of the dead, and the last judgment,⁶³

⁶¹Ibid., p. 285.

⁶²Reasons, p. 90.

⁶³Ibid.

Furthermore, Gill, like many Dissenters, sometimes judged a man's preaching according to the manner and tone of voice in delivery as much as by its content!

Three reverberations to Gill's observations resounded from the Established Church. First, if the Thirty-nine Articles are not objectionable, then why not remain in the Church to correct the abuse of them? Second, how can a Dissenter know what is being preached in the Church of England in view of the fact that he never attends? Third, the members of the Church of England have this great advantage:

... though the officiating minister should in his sermons either withhold or pervert the truth; yet they constantly hear it proclaimed in the lessons, psalms, epistles, and gospels, exhortations, creeds, confessions, supplications and thanksgiving which invariably claim their attention at every session of public worship.⁶⁴

The Singing of Hymns. Early English Baptists frowned upon the use of hymns and psalms in church services, but by the time of Gill's ministry, their use was beginning to be generally accepted. The practice of congregational singing had been introduced among Baptists by Benjamin Keach, one of Gill's predecessors, so the practice was fairly well established at Horsly-down before Gill began his ministry there.⁶⁵ Gill heartily approved of them and

⁶⁴Hart, p. 13.

⁶⁵Underwood, p. 112.

even exalted their status to that of a church ordinance. In the church's Declaration of Faith and Practice, the following item is listed along with the paragraphs concerning Baptism and the Lord's Supper:

We believe that singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, vocally, is an ordinance of the Gospel to be performed by believers; but that as to time, place, and manner, every one ought to be left to their liberty in using it.⁶⁶

That Gill did not consider the ordinance of singing quite so obligatory as other ordinances is indicated by his custom of placing the hymns at the close of the service so that all who disapproved of them might leave.

Although he sanctioned hymn singing in principle, Gill considered certain hymns unfit because of their theology. He ruled that all acceptable hymns should be written by good men and should be "agreeable to the sacred writings and to the analogy of faith."⁶⁷ On one occasion, he wrote a preface to a new volume of hymns composed by a minister whom he had known in his youth. He took pains to point out that certain unacceptable phrases incorporated in several of the hymns had been renounced by their author. He wrote:

... the phrase 'offering Christ and grace' is sometimes used in these hymns, which may be offensive to some persons; and which the worthy author was

⁶⁶Rippon, p. 18.

⁶⁷Body III, p. 387.

led to use partly through custom, it not having been at the writing of them objected to, and partly through his affectionate concern and zeal for gaining upon souls and encouraging them to come to Christ; I can affirm upon good and sufficient testimony, that Mr. Davis, before his death, changed his mind in this matter and disused the phrase as being improper, and as being bold and free for a minister to use of.⁶⁸

Gill's conviction about the selection and use of hymns was another reason he gave for his inability to belong to the Established Church.

Prayer. Another church ordinance which the Established Church has abused is prayer. According to Gill, persons who possess spiritual gifts should have no need for pre-composed prayers and should certainly not be bound to the use of them. Therefore, the Book of Common Prayer has no value to the truly spiritual man.⁶⁹ Such a man is able to compose prayers of his own without reading the prayers of other people. Moreover, the prayers contained in the Prayer Book are often incoherent and obscure, and they encourage the practice of "vain repetitions" which Jesus warned against. There is no evidence that the apostles or the first churches ever prayed set prayers; they relied upon the impromptu guidance of the Spirit.

⁶⁸R. Davis, Hymns (London, 1748), p. v.

⁶⁹Reasons, pp. 98-99.

Although Gill's theological system would seem to leave little room for prayer, he exhorted believers to pray. He defined prayer as "the speech of the soul to God: a talking to Him, a converse with Him, in which much of its communion lies with God."⁷⁰ Prayer is spiritual breathing which may be either mental or vocal, private or public. The Author of all true prayer is the Holy Spirit, and every prayer is a gift of God. Gill explained:

... the gift and grace of prayer come from him; he informs us of our wants, acquaints us with our necessities, teaches us, both in what manner, and for what we should pray; for what is most suitable for us, and agreeable to the will of God to bestow on us.⁷¹

Whenever God bestows His blessings upon praying people, He does so for His own sake and not because of their prayers.⁷² God's will is not changed by prayer, nor are His gracious intentions toward His people ever altered. Then why should men pray? Men should pray because this is the way and means that God has appointed for the communication of His blessings to His people. Though He has purposed, provided, and promised them, He has willed that men should seek them before they are given. Therefore, prayer is both a duty and a privilege. It is

⁷⁰Body III, p. 351.

⁷¹John Gill, A Discourse on Prayer (London, 1751), 2nd ed., p. 13.

⁷²Body I, p. 56.

a duty because it has been commanded by God, and it is a privilege because it is the avenue by which man receives God's goodness.⁷³ The eye of faith sees the treasures of God stored up for man, and prayer makes these treasures available. Thus, prayer serves a dual purpose. It promotes God's glory and it serves man's advantage.

The Lord's Prayer is a pattern for prayer; it is in a different category from all other pre-composed prayers because of its Author and because of the purpose for which He gave it. Every good prayer should contain the same emphases: praise, petition, and an indication of one's submission to God's will. The petitions should be mainly for the bestowal of spiritual blessings, and there should also be petitions for all sorts and conditions of men. Prayers of penitence are appropriate only in so long as it is remembered that forgiveness has already been granted through Christ; the aim of such a prayer should be to receive a renewed manifestation of this accomplished fact. Gill explained:

... it cannot be supposed that saints should pray that Christ's blood may be shed again to pronounce fresh pardon for them; nor that any fresh act of pardon should be passed in the divine mind, since God has forgiven all trespasses through the blood of his Son, shed once for all; but that they might have fresh manifestations, discoveries and applications of pardon, as they stand in need of them, being constantly sinning against God: in no other sense can I understand that pardon of sin can be prayed for by the saints.⁷⁴

⁷³Ibid., p. 57.

⁷⁴Ibid., II, p. 228.

All prayers should be prayed in the name of Jesus Christ, the Mediator, for He is the believer's heavenly Intercessor. It is He alone who channel's man's prayer into the presence of the Father. For this reason, all appeals to saints, to the Virgin, or to statues, are in vain. There is no other way of approaching God except by way of Jesus Christ.⁷⁵

IV. CHURCH AND STATE

Baptists and Anabaptists. During the seventeenth century, every Churchman believed at bottom that every Dissenter was a rebel against the government. This frame of mind was difficult to overcome, especially as it expressed itself toward Baptists. Until well into the eighteenth century, most Churchmen failed to distinguish between the Baptists of Britain and the Anabaptists on the continent. This confusion resulted in crediting the English Baptists with a rebellious attitude toward government of any kind. Englishmen found it easy to believe that the Baptists in their midst, like the fanatic Anabaptists of Germany, were outrageous revolutionaries. This false identification had been further aggravated by such extravagances as were seen among the Fifth Monarchy men whose activities revived hazy recollections of the doings of the Anabaptists of Munster. Although there was no real connection

⁷⁵Body III, p. 355.

between the two groups, either historically or theologically, the name Anabaptist was frequently applied to Baptists by their opponents.

Gill hotly resented this erroneous identification, ("Baptist, falsely called Anabaptist"), and he refuted the charge whenever he heard it. He disavowed all associations with those who caused the trouble in Germany and he said of them:

... a people who never had any connections with us, and with whom we neither agree, nor they with us, as not in their political principles, no, not in baptism itself, which it is affirmed they administered by sprinkling and not dipping.⁷⁶

He condemned all persons who proposed to pull down civil magistracy or to disrupt the order of civil government in order to set up a so-called "kingdom of Christ." According to Gill, such persons only succeed in bringing the doctrine of the millennium into disrepute. The establishment of Christ's kingdom should give kings no cause to fear since it will not be established on this present earth; nor should the anticipation of it give any encouragement to seditious persons, for God alone will be able to inaugurate it.⁷⁷

Because of the popular mind's association of the

⁷⁶John Gill, Answer to Addington (London, 1746), p. 21.

⁷⁷Body III, p. 436.

Baptists with the Anabaptists, Gill and his Baptist contemporaries felt called upon to pledge their loyalty to the State in every time of government crisis. Whenever a new sovereign mounted the throne, a statement of allegiance from his Baptist subjects was always forthcoming. Gill was proud of the Baptist record of loyalty. On one occasion he wrote:

Our confessions of faith, both of the general and particular persuasions throughout the last century show, that we believe in civil magistracy in all things lawful, and our behaviour has always been agreeable to our principles and profession: so that we may claim to ourselves the characters of being the quiet and peaceable in the land. In what plot or conspiracies, insurrections, or rebellions against the present family have any of us been?⁷⁸

The Principle of Separation. The relationship of the Church of England to the State was one of Gill's strongest reasons for being a Dissenter. He summarized his attitude succinctly when he said, "We know that national churches are good for nothing since they are not agreeable to the Rule of the divine Word."⁷⁹ Because he believed that nothing could be lawfully established in either Church or State which did not find certain warrant in Scripture, Gill strenuously denied the supremacy of the Crown over the Church. He insisted that Jesus Christ

⁷⁸Answer to Addington, p. 20.

⁷⁹Reply to Clark, p. 15.

has the power to prescribe rules for Church organization -- not Parliament; moreover, there is no need for the enactment of new laws since sufficient ones can be found in the Bible.

National churches are also wrong because they unite the Church with the world, and the true Church cannot be so joined without becoming contaminated. This union of the Church to the nation is built upon the practice of infant baptism by which the Antichrist has spread his baneful influence over many countries.⁸⁰ There is no possibility of a thorough reformation in religion until the Church is completely severed from its affiliation with the State. Since Christ's kingdom is not of this world, His Church cannot be established upon worldly maxims or supported by worldly power or policy. The true Church should be like an enclosed garden made up of people who live apart from the world and who are not equally yoked with other men.⁸¹

Gill drew a line of separation between man's religious life and his civil life. He thought of these two spheres of activity as existing quite independently of each other and he contrasted all spiritual and internal affairs with

⁸⁰John Gill, Infant Baptism, Part and Pillar of Popery (London, 1766), p. 1.

⁸¹Body III, p. 239.

all earthly and external affairs. He regarded the former as religious and the latter as either irreligious or indifferent. Whenever these two areas of life intrude upon each other, every effort should be made to disentangle them -- the Test Act, for example, both an ecclesiastical regulation and a civil statute. Gill held this up as a classic illustration of the corruption which inevitably ensues whenever the Church and the State are united together.

Civil Obedience. Although the Church is made up of persons who are separated from the world, Christians must communicate with the world through the fulfillment of their civil responsibilities. The State was divinely conceived for the mutual benefit of all men whether they be within the Church or without. The task of a government is to formulate laws sufficient to maintain some semblance of law and order, and this can be done only in so far as those who rule promise to legislate for the well-being of all and only in so long as those who are ruled pledge their fidelity to the law. The State, therefore, exists by the mutual consent of both the rulers and the ruled, and the primary purpose of its existence is to restrain the forces of evil. Since Gill saw no possibility of establishing a theocracy this side of the millenium, he had little preference for one form of government over another. His indifference on this subject is illustrated by the statement

below:

... which is the best sort of government I will not take upon me to say, but this I will venture to say, that the worst is better than none at all; perhaps a mixed government may be best ... as ours is: there is an appearance of monarchy in the king, of aristocracy in the nobles, and of democracy in the commons, chosen by the suffrages of the people.⁸²

Following the teaching of Paul, Gill taught that to resist those in civil authority was to resist those whom God has ordained. Although the government of a particular state may be bad, some form of government is necessary, and every Christian owes his obedience to it. Christians may become magistrates if they choose, for the better the man, the better the magistrate. They may also support the State by enlisting as soldiers. Every Christian should remember his government in prayer and should pay his taxes promptly.

Respect for the laws of nations and obedience to civil authorities does not involve any infringement upon Christian liberty, for civil laws are concerned with external affairs and leave the conscience unbound.⁸³ Christian liberty refers to an inner freedom which is not normally interfered with in fulfilling civil obligations. So long as the conscience remains unbound, kings and magistrates should be obeyed in the execution of their lawful

⁸²Ibid., pp. 419-20.

⁸³Ibid., II, pp. 267-68.

power.

What constitutes a violation of a Christian's conscience? Unfortunately, Gill failed to specify.

Religious Freedom. A new conception of government arose in the eighteenth century: that government exists for the security of liberty and property, for the extension of trade, for the material well-being of the people, and has nothing to do with religion.⁸⁴ This attitude was most acceptable to the majority of Dissenters who believed that there should be freedom from any interference by the State in matters of worship.

Although Gill's definition of the true Church limited it almost exclusively to the Particular Baptist denomination, he nonetheless advocated freedom for all other groups -- with one exception. This one exception was the Roman Catholic Church, and Gill was not alone in this opinion. Ever since James II granted freedom of religion in an attempt to re-institute Roman Catholicism, Dissenters and Churchmen alike regarded the Roman Church as a dormant danger waiting for the opportune moment to grasp the throne. They reasoned that, since the Papists believed in the right of the Pope to depose kings, they should be treated as enemies of England.

⁸⁴Whiting, p. 477.

This shared hatred of Roman Catholicism was one of the main factors which produced the new and more tolerant spirit toward other Dissenters. In 1745, when the fear of the Pretender gripped the land, Baptists looked to the Established Church as an ally and a friend. Gill spoke out from his pulpit in defense of the king, saying:

King David's subjects rebelled against him treacherously without cause. Such are them who are risen up against our rightful sovereign, King George; a parcel of perfidious, treacherous, wretches ...⁸⁵

Petty differences began to be minimized in the face of the Papist threat.

Gill's concern for the preservation of religious freedom was not confined to his fear of Roman Catholicism. He feared the Church of England as well. He was unwilling to forget her past acts of persecution, and he believed that her persecuting spirit still smoldered and might flare up again at any time. Gill remained vigilant against that day. He was always primed to make his defense.

⁸⁵Ivimey III, p. 242.

CHAPTER VIII

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

I. THE MAN

John Gill's life was so consumed in writing that he had very little time left for anything else. He spent most of his ministry in his study. Day after day he arose at dawn and remained with his books until dark. Usually he breakfasted in his study alone and was not seen by his family until dinner. This regular routine of unremitted writing accounts for the enormous number of pages that came from his pen -- over ten thousand!

Gill's writing was not motivated by any sense of duty, nor did he consider it an act of drudgery. He approached it with cheerful perseverance. His study was his home, and his books were his friends. He was never happier than when he was completing something for publication or when he was preparing a pamphlet for a current controversy. He neither needed nor desired relaxation from his writing, for in a very real sense, it was his recreation. Nothing gave him greater satisfaction; this was his element.

Other than his own congregation, very few people knew Gill personally. He was impatient with people who made demands upon his time or who interrupted his study schedule. He did very little social mingling, for he found that the majority of people had nothing significant to say; and unless a person could stimulate him intellectually or converse with him about subjects of mutual scholarly interests, he begrudged the visit as a waste of valuable time away from his work.

The only social life which he really enjoyed was his professional contact with other ministers. When the Particular Baptist ministers of the London area organized a society in 1724, Gill became a charter member. This group met together regularly each week at the Gloucestershire Coffee House, and Gill was nearly always present.¹ Sometimes he also met with Dissenting ministers of other denominations under the hospitable roof of a Mr. Thomas Watson, a Baptist layman who provided an open table for them every Tuesday evening. On these occasions, Gill had very little to say unless certain subjects of a theological or Biblical nature were introduced, and then he became loquacious. Gill was proud of the scope of his studies, and he was not above impressing this fact upon his associates at these gatherings. Once he said to one of them, "Brother

¹Rippon, p. 117.

Clayton, they tell me that you have been expounding the Revelation. A man who enters upon that work should first have some acquaintance with history, the prophecies in general, and many other things." "Why, Doctor," Clayton replied, "I did as well as I could, and you can't do any better." This well pointed remark was received with laughter.²

Fortunately, Gill was not without a sense of humor, but he found it difficult to unbend. Laughter came easiest in the company of other preachers. He was unable to come down to the level of most people in order to be jocose with them. Whenever he attempted to do so, his manner was "like Hercules with the distaff or Goliath threading a needle."³ Most of his jokes were ponderous and overwhelming and often at the expense of those to whom they were told. On one evening, he was returning from the city by boat with a Dissenting minister of another denomination when an unexpected swell in the tide caused them some anxiety. The other minister said, "Ah! Doctor, you don't fear, you love much water." "Yes," Gill replied, "I do love much water in its proper place, but not in a barber's basin!" When they arrived without mishap, the conversation resumed. "Well, Doctor," his companion said, "much water has

²Spurgeon, p. 44.

³Ibid., p. 43.

done us no harm." "True," replied Gill, "and you can be sure that sprinkling alone would never have brought us safe ashore!"⁴ This repartee is said to have been typical of Gill's style of humor -- always with a barb.

Gill had two close friends. One of these was John Ryland, a scholarly Baptist minister who was also a schoolmaster. Ryland was an able student and a strong Calvinist who shared both Gill's interest and outlook and afforded him much pleasure in conversation. His second and closest friend was Augustus Toplady, author of the hymn, Rock of Ages. Gill always welcomed Toplady's company, and Toplady's admiration and affection for Gill was such that he could express it only in superlatives.

Toplady refused to see any guile in Gill. He strenuously objected to the public accusations of bigotry which were made against his friend. According to Toplady, bigotry is "blind and furious attachment" to something, whereas, the spirit expressed by Gill sprang from a steadfast adherence to true propositions. Said Toplady, "This can no more be called bigotry than the shining of the sun can be called ostentation."⁵ He credited any discourteousness by Gill toward his assailants to "complexional sensibility," and he said that persons who made derogatory judgments about him were simply "unacquainted with his real temper and char-

⁴Rippon, p. 118.

⁵Ibid., p. 139.

⁶Ibid.

acter."⁷

Toplady's unqualified praise of Gill was prejudiced by the affection of friendship, for Gill was no saint. He had a venomous tongue and an uncontrollable temper which occasionally lashed out at those whom he encountered in controversy. The fact that the use of vitriolic language was more readily accepted in public controversies then than it would be today, does not excuse the spirit which inspired it. It would also be difficult to completely clear Gill of the charge of bigotry. He sometimes spoke with the intolerant air of ex cathedra infallibility, almost as if his opinions were those of God Himself. He possessed an enormous pride, and he suffered from an exaggerated sense of self-esteem which he was unable to hide.

Gill was aware of his faults. He knew the danger of his temper, and he sometimes looked back upon his display of it with regret. Although it was exceedingly difficult for him to do, he occasionally made a public apology to a wounded opponent. The Reverend Samuel Stennett said of him:

And though he knew how with a spirit to resent an injury, he knew how also with becoming meekness to endure and forgive it. His warmth might indeed on some occasions exceed, yet he had prudence and resolution to check it; and failed not afterwards like a good man as he was, to feel great pain on

⁷Ibid.

account of it.⁸

At least Gill was straightforward. He never hesitated to attach his name to anything he wrote despite the fact that many of his attackers were anonymous. John Wesley described him as "a positive man" who "fights for his opinions through thick and thin."⁹ One is inclined to wonder whether Gill's obstinacy in opinion coupled with his tendency to boast of his accomplishments, might have been a manifestation of a hidden inferior feeling for never having had a proper education. Sometimes his air of over-confidence suggested a basic insecurity.

Those who respected Gill revered him as a man of strong conviction, as a bulwark of faith who feared no one. Many of his admirers stood in awe of him; they praised him as their hero, but they never knew him as a companion or friend. The size of his stature and the force of his voice encouraged them to keep a safe distance. People were seldom indifferent to Gill. They either liked him very much or they did not like him at all.

Most of the people in his community looked up to Gill as a principled man and as possessing an exemplary character.

⁸Samuel Stennett, The Victorious Christian Receiving the Crown (London, 1771), pp. 32-33.

⁹Rippon, p. 65.

Though he was not a particularly public-spirited man, he was considered a good citizen; he was known to have a patriotic spirit despite his Dissenting status, and he revered the law. His neighbors regarded him as a man of uncompromising consistency and as a person of impeccable moral rectitude. Although he seldom preached good works, he practiced them, and with the exception of an occasional outburst of temper, Gill was a model of holy conversation and godliness.

II. THE SCHOLAR

It is phenomenal that a man of Gill's limited educational background could have accomplished such a vast amount of writing, despite the fact that few of his publications can be classified as scholarly achievements. Unfortunately, most of Gill's undertakings were much too ambitious for his ability. He was devoted to the scholarly way of life, and for that he demands a scholar's respect, but devotion alone was not sufficient to guarantee scholarly success. Gill distinguished himself more for the quantity of his writing than he did for the quality of it.

Among his own contemporaries, however, Gill was praised most extravagantly for his work. Everywhere he went he was known as a man of great learning. Most people thought of him primarily as a teacher and a scholar rather

than as a preacher. Toplady expressed the judgment of many of Gill's contemporaries when he wrote:

His attainments, both in abstruse and polite literature, were equally extensive and profound ... It would, perhaps, try the constitutions of half the literati in England only to read with care and attention the whole of what he wrote. The Doctor considered not any subject superficially, or by halves. As deeply as human sagacity enlightened by grace could penetrate, he went to the bottom of everything he engaged in. With a solidity of judgment, and with an acuteness of discernment, peculiar to few, he exhausted, as it were, the very souls and substance of most arguments he undertook.¹⁰

The work which made Gill most famous was his Biblical commentary. It incorporated the bulk of his previous publications, including his sermons, and represented the labors of a lifetime. The first of these nine enormous tomes was printed in 1746. Two additional volumes followed the next succeeding years, and then the Exposition of the New Testament was complete. It was upon the completion of this work in 1748 that Gill received his highest commendation: Marischal College and University at Aberdeen conferred upon him the Doctor of Divinity degree. The citation accompanying the degree explained that it was given in recognition of his outstanding knowledge of the Scripture, of Oriental languages, and of Jewish antiquities.¹¹ Professor Osborn,

¹⁰Ibid., p. 137.

¹¹See Appendix D.

Principal of the University, wrote to him in a letter, saying:

... on account of the honest and learned defense of the true sense of the Holy Scripture against the profane attacks of Deists and Infidels, and the reputation his other works had procured him in the learned world, as soon as it was moved in the University to confer the degree of Doctor of Divinity, it was readily agreed unto ...¹²

When Gill was told of this action, he replied, "I neither thought it, nor bought it, nor sought it."¹³

Ten years passed before he began the publication of his Exposition of the Old Testament, a six-volume project which kept him busy until 1766. The chief significance of Gill's commentary today is that it was the first verse by verse exposition of the entire Bible ever published in the English language, and the first such work ever done by a Baptist. Otherwise, it is of interest only as an illustration of Gill's use of Scripture, which he expounded on the basis of his preconceived theological system.

Another tribute to his scholarly reputation came from Chamber's Cyclopaedia. One of the editors of this concern, a Mr. Solomon Lowe, came across an address that Gill had delivered to a young men's prayer group on the Singing of Psalms.¹⁴ He judged this to be such an informative

¹²Rippon, p. 59.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴John Gill, A Discourse on Singing of Psalms (London, 1751), 2nd ed.

pamphlet that he asked Gill's permission to incorporate it in the article on Psalmody and also requested a copy of everything Gill had ever published. Gill was very much flattered by this communication, but Mr. Lowe died shortly thereafter, and there is no evidence that any of Gill's material was ever actually used.¹⁵

Gill considered himself an authority in the field of Rabbinical literature, and on the basis of this knowledge he wrote two dissertations which suffered rather severe criticisms. The first of these was concerned with the technicality of the Hebrew language and was called, A Dissertation Concerning the Antiquity of the Hebrew Language, Letters, Vowels, Points, and Accents.¹⁶ Gill's thesis was that the points, which have been represented as very numerous, consisted of only one point which has been diversified and placed in different positions. Gill anticipated the abusive reviews he received, for he wrote in the Preface, "Should I be attacked by sciolists, I expect nothing but petulance, supercilious airs, and approbrious language."¹⁷ Many of the responses to the publication were just as he expected, but among the exceptions was a word of praise from Doctor James Robertson of the University of

¹⁵Sermons and Tracts, p. xxi.

¹⁶John Gill, A Dissertation Concerning the Antiquity of the Hebrew Language (London, 1767).

¹⁷Ibid., p. xlii.

Edinburgh who complimented him for such a scholarly study.¹⁸

Gill's second controversial work based upon his Rabbinical knowledge was called, A Dissertation Concerning the Baptism of Jewish Proselytes.¹⁹ His principal purpose in writing this was to discredit those who argued that the silence of the Bible about infant baptism was accounted for by the prevalent practice of proselyte baptism among the Jews. Defying eminent scholars, Gill demonstrated that this rite was "nowhere mentioned in any writings before the time of John and Christ, nor in any after, nearer than the third or fourth centuries."²⁰ Unquestionably, Gill was familiar with the Mishnah, the Talmuds, and the Targums, but he was prone to find what he was looking for and to date the material according to the chronology most convenient for his purpose. Nevertheless, this sphere of study did give to Gill some valuable insights about the significance of New Testament rites and customs as they are related to their Jewish origins. A Baptist Encyclopedia, published in 1881, said of him:

¹⁸Rippon, p. 86.

¹⁹John Gill, A Dissertation Concerning the Baptism of Jewish Proselytes (London, 1770), first published in Body III.

It is within bounds to say that no man in the eighteenth century was so well versed in the literature and customs of the ancient Jews as John Gill. He has sometimes been called the Doctor John Lightfoot of the Baptists. This compliment, in the estimation of some persons, flatters Doctor Lightfoot more than Doctor Gill ...²¹

Despite his careless use of this knowledge of Jewish antiquities, Gill did make a definite scholarly contribution to Biblical understanding on the basis of it.

The question of Gill's scholarly integrity cannot be avoided. He was remarkably astute in extricating a uniform point of view from the Bible which coincided with his theological system in every detail. He also habitually magnified those sections which were most companionable to his thought while carefully wheeling around those that pointed in another direction. His skill in finding obscure meanings in straightforward statements was sometimes nothing short of astonishing, and he was adept in leaving a perplexity behind after a most perfunctory consideration of it. His scholarly integrity also comes into question in connection with his references to other theologians. For example, Witsius was always hailed as a "great divine" whenever his theology was the same as Gill's, but when the subject of Baptism

²¹William Cathcart, The Baptist Encyclopedia (Philadelphia, 1881), Vol. I, p. 453.

came up, all references to Witsius abruptly ceased. Similarly, he quoted Calvin as endorsing adult immersion but he never revealed the reasons why Calvin adopted infant baptism. Gill's integrity as a scholar was further jeopardized by his intense prejudices. Every time he wrote about the Roman Church, for example, he thought with his emotions instead of his mind, and he often launched out into the most scathing tirades on the basis of a fragment of information. Another area of study in which facts faded into the background was the field of prophecy. Whenever Gill explained those sections of the Bible, he indulged in a brand of exegesis which could at best be labelled wild speculation. In all of these instances, Gill lacked essential scholarly dispassion -- perhaps not intentionally -- but, nevertheless, this absence of objectivity lessened his trustworthiness. Maybe his own ideas were so deeply ingrained that he was honestly unable to see beyond them.

Gill's style also leaves much to be desired. He wrote interminable sentences -- often a half-page long -- and employed structural usage which was sometimes exceedingly difficult to follow, even when the subject under consideration was comparatively simple. His style was ponderous, and, lacking skill in selectivity, he was inevitably verbose. He included much superfluous material

and he perpetually repeated himself. In an introduction to a chapter about the life of God, for example, he included a preliminary section about the life in stones, plants, and animals.²² Surprisingly, however, he had an analytical mind which always organized material according to outline, but the content of these outlines tended to be painfully tedious. For example, in explaining the effect of sanctification on sin, he listed the following subheadings:

1. Condemnation of Sin.
2. Dislike of Sin.
3. Loathing of Sin.
4. Hatred of Sin.
5. Opposition to Sin.
6. Abstinence from Sin.
7. Lamenting Sin.
8. Freedom from Sin.²³

One gets the impression that he was carried away with his own flow of words without awareness of the redundancies. His excessive frills and phrases keep the reader busy trying to sift the wheat from the chaff.

Gill's contemporaries considered him a highly skilled argumentative writer, but his argumentative techniques were few. The method which he used more than any other was the most blatant form of begging the question. The following statement is typical:

²²Body I, p. 73.

²³Body II, pp. 307-308.

"The eternity of God may be proved from his attributes, several of which are said to be eternal."²⁴ Of course, the conclusions drawn from such approaches as this were seldom convincing. He also employed his most serious reasoning powers to the most absurd problems. In a discussion about angels, he reasoned, "Angels could not have fallen before the sixth day, for 'God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good' -- and yet they must have fallen before Adam."²⁵ Gill was not lacking in creative thought, but very few important ideas were original with him. His thought was often superficial and sometimes incredibly naive.

This evaluation of Gill's style and scholarship may seem extremely harsh, but it is significant to notice that this judgment was also voiced by certain persons in his own day. The great Welsh preacher, Christmas Evans, once extolled the expressiveness of the Welsh language to his friend Robert Hall, and he terminated his statement by saying what a pity it was that John Gill's works had not been translated into the Welsh tongue. Robert Hall is said to have replied, "I wish they had, sir; I wish they had, with all my heart, sir, for I should never have read them! They are a continent of mud, sir!"²⁶

²⁴Body I, p. 68. ²⁵Ibid., p. 448. ²⁶Underwood, p. 170.

Perhaps the real test of a man's scholarly ability is the lasting quality of his work. Absolutely nothing from Gill's pen is known today. In his own lifetime and shortly thereafter, his books and pamphlets were printed in several editions, so great was their demand and popularity. In looking back upon the scholarly giants of the eighteenth century, however, it is easy to guess that the circulation of Gill's books was largely confined to a certain type of mind, the kind of mind which is easily impressed by a flow of words but is lacking in critical acumen.

It is tragic that Gill was deprived of adequate educational training, for he possessed the other scholarly prerequisites of good health, a good memory, and an unflagging industry. He was an avid student, and the scholarly life was his first love. Whenever his friends wished to express their certainty of something, they could say with confidence, "As surely as Doctor Gill is in his study."²⁷ At least he deserves credit for one thing. He was revered and respected as a scholar by many of his Baptist colleagues, and in this role, he contributed much toward overcoming a traditional distrust among Baptists for learning.

²⁷

Sermons and Tracts I, p. vii.

III. THE PREACHER

Gill preached with an eye for publication. Nearly every sermon he delivered was incorporated later within his Biblical commentary or whatever current book he happened to be writing at the time. Others of his sermons were published separately. He preached an average of three new sermons every week, and as each of these was inserted into its proper place, the mighty mass of material from his pen steadily mounted. His pulpit fed the press.

All of Gill's preaching was expository, and the majority of his sermons were from the Old Testament. Frequently he prepared successive sermons from several additional verses each week. Sometimes he would have as many as three such series underway simultaneously. On Sunday mornings he would consider one book, on Sunday evening a second book, and at a mid-week meeting or on the Lord's Supper days, he would preach from yet a third. This method was acceptable to Gill's people and at the same time was a profitable procedure for facilitating the completion of his own scholarly endeavors.

Like his books, all of Gill's sermons were of a heavy doctrinal content. He gave his people a steady diet of doctrine. All of his sermons were dogmatic and

declarative in nature, never evangelical in the sense of seeking to inspire a commitment to Christ. He did not regard the pulpit as a place for soul winning. He considered this to be the task of God, nor of preachers. He thought that the responsibility of the preacher was to proclaim the Word and that this should be done merely by expounding doctrinal truth. The Gospel is a gift of God which comes from Him alone, and no preacher has the right to offer that which is not his to give. Gill's sermons would sometimes lead right up to the point where an invitation to accept Christ or a plea for a personal commitment would seem to be a natural conclusion, but whenever he reached that point, his sermon would terminate -- almost abruptly. An illustration of this may be seen in the sermon excerpt below:

The doctrines the apostle chiefly insisted upon, during the whole of his ministry were reducible to these two heads -- repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. God, against whom man has sinned, is the object of the one; and Christ, who is the Redeemer and Saviour, is the object of the other. Repentance must be towards God; it lies in a true sense of sin, and godly sorrow for it; in shame and blushing at it; and in owning and forsaking it; flowing from a view of the love of God, and of pardoning grace and mercy through Christ; attended with faith in him, and expecting grace and life and salvation by him. Faith has Christ for its object; and it is a believing in his person, blood and righteousness, and sacrifice; a looking to him, leaning on him, trusting in him, and expecting life and salvation from him.²⁸

²⁸John Gill, A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Reverend Samuel Wilson (London, 1750), pp. 7-8.

Many theologians, who do not share Gill's hyper-Calvinist system, would find the above sermon extract acceptable as a correct statement of evangelical repentance and saving faith. The difference lies in the application of the statement. Gill would never have consented to urge men to repentance or to offer salvation through Christ. He was convinced that to do this would be to interfere with the operation of God who should have the sole glory of converting and sanctifying the elect. Gill never seemed to realise that his declarations of doctrinal truth might well have been objected to on the same ground; for after all, doctrinal explanations deprive God of the honor of enlightening and informing man's mind. Furthermore, the act of reasoning and narrating Gospel truths is in itself a form of persuasiveness.

Gill also had the reputation for refusing to preach the practical implications of the Gospel. He sometimes emphasized the doctrine of salvation by sovereign grace alone to the extent of failing to exhort his people to good works. This trend in his sermon subject-matter was one of the reasons why he was labelled as an Antinomian by so many of his contemporaries. Actually, however, Gill did not neglect this side of his preaching to quite the extent he has been accused. It was not uncommon for him

to implore his people to practice Christian virtues and to look to the law as a standard for holy living. Such sermons as The Law in the Hands of Christ²⁹ and The Law Established by the Gospel³⁰ are pertinent illustrations of this fact. On one occasion, a visitor in Gill's congregation was asked after the service what he thought of the sermon, and the visitor (who had anticipated an Antinomian emphasis) replied, "Well, sir, if I had not been told that it was the great Doctor Gill who preached, I should have said I had heard an Arminian."³¹

In a sermon preached in 1757, at the time of the removal of his congregation from Horsly-down to a new meeting-house in Carterlane, Gill stated his intended purpose in preaching as follows:

What doctrines may be taught in this place, after I am gone, is not for me to know; but, as for my own part, I am at a point; I am determined, and have been long ago, what to make the subject of my ministry. It is now upwards of forty years since I entered into the arduous work; and the first sermon I ever preached was from these words of the apostle, 'For I am determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified; and, through the grace of God, I have been enabled, in some good measure, to abide by the same resolution hitherto, as many of you here are my witnesses; and I hope, through divine assistance, I ever shall, as long as I am in this tabernacle and engaged in such a work.'³²

²⁹John Gill, The Law in the Hands of Christ (London, 1761).

³⁰John Gill, The Law Established by the Gospel (London, 1756), 2nd. ed.

³¹Spurgeon, p. 47.

³²John Gill, Attendance in Places of Religious Worship II (London, 1757), pp. 43-44.

A further indication of his ideas about the use of the pulpit can be found in the advice he gave to young preachers at their services of ordination. He cautioned against the use of controversy in the pulpit, for he said that even though such sermons were expertly managed, they were seldom edifying.³³ He observed that the tone of controversy tended to dampen the true spirit of religion and devotion. "The only thing to be considered," he advised, "is, is it true?"³⁴ If the message is true, speak it without fear, even "though it may be traduced as irrational, or licentious, and be loaded with reproach and charged with dangerous consequences."³⁵

Sometimes Gill took a manuscript into the pulpit and sometimes he preached from a brief outline, but in neither case was he a slave to his notes. He had his message well in mind, though not memorized, and he put the full force of his body into its delivery. It is said that as a young man he sometimes saturated three or four handkerchiefs in the course of a single sermon, but despite this energetic method of delivery, he was offended when anyone described his preaching as "enthusiastic." As a middle-aged and older man, his deportment in the pulpit became solemn and deliberate.

³³John Gill, The Work of a Gospel Minister Recommended to Consideration (London, 1763), p. 13.

³⁴Ibid., p. 10.

³⁵Ibid.

The comments about Gill's preaching by his contemporaries range all the way from the highest praise to utter contempt. At one end of the gamut, the following tribute is typical:

He was blessed with ready utterance and with great volubility of speech, so that he was apt to teach. With what gravity and majesty had he used to stand and feed the Church of God! How did his listening audiences hang as it were upon his lips, while evangelical truths did sweetly drop from his mellifluous tongue.³⁶

Another critic warned that one should not expect to hear "the little niceties of professed refinement" but that by attentive sifting of the wheat, one could find food for his soul.³⁷ The most negative response to Gill's preaching is typified by the story of an old man in his congregation who, often after a service, reproached him with a cynical sneer and asked, "Is that preaching?" Gill accepted this rebuke gracefully for a time, but one day in the presence of a large group of people, he lashed out at the man in the full strength of his voice, and, pointing to the pulpit, said, "Go up and do better -- go up and do better!"³⁸

As a young man, Gill preached to large congregations, but by the end of his life he had only one hundred and

³⁶Thomas Craner, A Grain of Gratitude (London, 1771), pp. 31-32.

³⁷Preface to A Collection of Sermons and Tracts ... Several of which were Never before Printed (London, 1773).

³⁸Rippon, p. 125.

fifty hearers in a meeting-house that once held twelve hundred.³⁹ In a sense, he was always a popular preacher, but perhaps in his latter years, he was not so much in demand because of his style or his sermon content as he was for his reputation as a writer and a leader among Particular Baptists. He was in constant demand for the delivery of funeral sermons and for ordination addresses. Many people felt that their dead had not been properly interred unless John Gill had officiated, and young men entering the ministry felt that they had not been properly inducted without words of wisdom from the great John Gill.

IV. THE PASTOR

Gill did not distinguish himself as a pastor. He was so preoccupied with his writing and his preaching that he had little time left for personal contacts with his people. He was a very poor visitor, and whenever he did manage to get into the homes of his members, his calls were invariably brief.

He considered his primary responsibility as Pastor to protect his people from doctrinal impurities. He never tired of cautioning them about erroneous statements of faith, and whenever he sensed that an heretical idea had

³⁹Cyril S. Wilmsburst, "Early History of Our Church," The Sword and the Trowel (No. 1047, Vol. 88), publication of The Metropolitan Tabernacle, London.

crept into the congregation, he was not content until it had been recanted. The Church Record Book narrates several such instances. On one occasion, Gill was informed that several members were expressing grave doubt about the doctrine of sanctifying grace. The matter was immediately brought before the church, and the following action resulted:

Agreed, that to deny the internal sanctification of the Spirit, as a principle of grace and holiness wrought in the heart; or as consisting of grace communicated to and implanted in the soul, which, though but a begun work, and as yet incomplete, is an abiding work of grace, and will abide, notwithstanding all corruptions, temptations, and snares, and be performed by the author of it until the day of Christ, when it will be the saints' meetness for eternal glory; it is a grievous error, which highly reflects dishonour on the blessed Spirit and his operations of grace on the heart, is subversive of true religion and powerful godliness, and renders persons unfit for church communion. Wherefore, it is further agreed, that such persons who appear to have embraced this error be not admitted to the communion of this church; and should any such who are members of it appear to have received it and continue in it, that they be forthwith excluded from it.⁴⁰

Accordingly, three members withdrew from the church. Gill was always grieved when such disciplinary action became necessary, but he believed that the church had to maintain confessional conformity at all costs, lest the members with irregular ideas contaminate the others.

He was also concerned about the moral purity of his people. Any member who was reported to have participated

⁴⁰Church Record Book.

in any questionable activity was liable to be called before the church to account for his behavior or else to confess his sins and ask forgiveness. Gill had deep-rooted Puritan ideas about what constituted moral uprightness. He considered card playing to be an invention of the devil, and he condemned the theater as a seedbed of wickedness. Whenever he was accused of making light of the moral law in his preaching, Gill always pointed to the reputation of his people with pride. He said, "To the honour of the Baptists, I have not known a single person for these thirty years that goes to plays."⁴¹ He was not opposed to taking "a little wine for the stomach's sake" since this is prescribed in Scripture.

Whenever Gill was called upon to hear the problems of his people, he is said to have been sympathetic. He was noted for giving direct, concise advice whenever it was requested, but sometimes he became impatient in his dealings with members. If provoked, he did not hesitate to let his mind be heard. The following story of Gill's encounter with a garrulous woman in his congregation has been preserved by Charles H. Spurgeon. It seems that this woman had objected to the excessive length of Gill's white bands. "Well, well," said the Doctor, "what do you think is the right length? Take them and make them as long or

⁴¹ Answer to Addington, p. 23.

as short as you like." The lady expressed her delight: she was so sure that her dear Pastor would grant her request that she had brought her scissors with her. Snip, snip, snip, and the thing was done! "Now," said Gill, "my sister, you must do me a good turn also." "Yes, that I will, Doctor. What can it be?" "Well -- you have something about you which is a little too long and causes me no end of trouble, and I should like to see it shorter." "Indeed, dear sir, I will not hesitate." "Come then," said Gill, "good sister, put out your tongue."⁴²

Despite the occasional brusqueness of his manner and his aloofness from his people, Gill was revered and respected by his congregation -- and even loved. For fifty-one years he was their Pastor. Many of his members had never known another minister. As his reputation became established through the years, his people became increasingly proud of him, and they echoed his own self-praise. They cheered him like a champion and encouraged him in his work.

In the last years of his ministry, Gill grew feeble. He moved to a rural retreat in Camberwell, and his relationship to the church consisted only of preaching on Sundays. His health was so unpredictable that sometimes a deacon had to take charge of the service at the last moment.

⁴²Sword and Trowel, p. 44.

With such a limited leadership, a few of the members began to lose interest, and others drifted away -- particularly the young people. This trend became so acute that, finally, the church appointed a committee to approach him about the possibility of employing a co-pastor to assist him, but Gill was hurt by the very suggestion. He said that in so far as he could see, the Scripture made no provision for the office of a co-pastor. Then, in a pathetic letter, he tendered his resignation. He wrote:

When I consider my advanced age, of the growing infirmities of it, which render me incapable of performing the duties of my office, as they ought to be performed, and how truly discouraging it is, when I consider how many of the members have been dropping off by death, one by one, and few or none coming in their stead, and others disposed to move elsewhere, and more still cold and indifferent, together with a decrease of the audience; when I say, I consider those things, I judge it most eligible, with your leave, to resign my office as Pastor of the church and then you will be at full liberty to choose another who may have greater strength of body and more vigor of mind to exercise it ... I can't say I wish he may serve you as long as I have, for perhaps, that may be to his disadvantage and to yours, but I wish he may serve you with greater success.⁴³

These are the words of a discouraged, if not disillusioned, old man. His congregation sensed this tone in his letter, and, fearing that he felt unappreciated and rejected, hastily replied, saying:

⁴³Church Record Book.

We greatly fear that you apprehend an abatement in our affection toward you. That we are not conscious of, we think it impossible that our love should be easily removed from him who has instrumentally been made so useful to our souls; but we trust that our hearts are knit as the heart of one man toward you, as the servant of Christ, and as our Father in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. Another grievance circumstance is, that if the Church is willing, you seem inclined to resign your office as Pastor. This expression is extremely alarming to us, and is what can by no means find a place in our thoughts, it being our fixed desire and continual prayer, that you may live and die in that endeared relation. We say with united voice, 'How can a father give up his children, or affectionate children their father?' Dear sir, we beseech you not to cast us off, but bear us upon your heart and spiritual affections all your days and let us be remembered to God through your prayers, and who knows but the Lord may visit us again and make us break forth on the right hand and on the left?⁴⁴

The letter was signed by the majority of the membership of the church.

Several months passed, and, on October 14, 1771, Gill died. He was seventy-three years of age. His pulpit was draped in black, and his people, who felt his removal deeply, agreed to honor him with two months of mourning. The Reverend Benjamin Wallin and Doctor Samuel Stennett were appointed to officiate at his funeral, and throughout the land, Baptists lifted up their voices in lamentation saying, "A great man is fallen in Israel."

⁴⁴Church Record Book.

V. THE INFLUENCE

In order to evaluate John Gill's influence, he must be seen in proper perspective. It should be remembered that he was the spokesman for a relatively small religious group and that even within his own denomination there were those who did not wholeheartedly endorse his theology. John Ryland estimated in 1753 that there were less than 5,000 Particular Baptists in the whole of England and Wales.⁴⁵

Gill was unquestionably the most influential man among Particular Baptists for a period of at least thirty years. Indeed, he was a sort of unofficial archbishop over a sizable following. From about 1745 to the time of his death, he was the senior and the presiding minister over many of the affairs relating to the denomination. His opinion was highly regarded; before any important decisions were made, he was consulted.

Young men coming into the denomination were enveloped by Gill's theological bias. They looked up to him as the personification of all the attributes needed for a successful ministry, and they accepted his every word as oracular. Several persons who knew him as their Pastor later became ministers themselves. One of these was the Reverend John Brine, who knew Gill when he was a young man

⁴⁵Ivimey III, p. 279.

in Kettering. Brine also located in London and became a leader among Baptists there. He reflected Gill's thought completely. Two other young ministers converted under Gill's ministry were the Reverend James Fall and the Reverend William Anderson, both of whom had relatively brief pastorates due to untimely deaths.

The sphere of Gill's denominational influence extended beyond his own country. He was indirectly responsible for the founding of the second Baptist church in Scotland, the Eristo Baptist Church in Edinburgh, in 1765. This church has now come to be recognized as the Mother church of Baptists North of the English border. Two Scotsmen, Archibald McGlean and Robert Carmichael, who were interested in the teachings of John Glas (who was deposed from the Church of Scotland in 1728 and joined the Sandemanian Sect) became convinced that Glas's principles led to a rejection of infant baptism. Desiring adult immersion and not knowing of any Baptists in Scotland, they wrote to John Gill and requested that he come to Scotland to help them organize a Baptist church. Gill was unable to make the journey, but he invited Carmichael to come to London instead. After a careful examination of Carmichael, which assured Gill of his soundness and sincerity, he baptized him on October 9, 1765. Carmichael then returned to Scotland where he and his friends established the Baptist cause.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society (1916-17), Vol. 5, pp. 94-95.

Gill was also influential in America. His predecessor, the Reverend Benjamin Stinton, had been the corresponding liaison between the Baptists of England and the Philadelphia Baptist Association. Whether Gill continued this correspondence is uncertain, but when his Exposition of the Bible was printed, a copy of it was enthusiastically received by this same Philadelphia Baptist group. In 1780, they proposed that the work be published on an installment basis in an abridged American edition. The advertisement that was circulated for the promotion of this project affirmed:

We cannot but suppose, every judicious Christian, will readily conceive the utility of this work. In this infant country, we are not in the possession of a suitable Exposition of the Sacred Scriptures. That of the judicious and learned Dr. Gill, can be obtained by very few, though its praise is known in all the churches ... We also add, we conceive this work will claim your particular attention on the behalf of the rising ministry, who are in a great measure destitute of the means which may be thought necessary to produce fruitfulness in their ministries.⁴⁷

Most of Gill's publications were known in America during his lifetime, but it was not until after his death that they were made more readily available to the American reading public. Typical of the letters of appreciation that were received from America for his work is the following statement believed to have been made by Doctor Samuel Stillman of Boston:

⁴⁷ Philadelphia Baptist Association Proposals (Philadelphia, 1780).

I have daily reason to bless God for your valuable Exposition of the Old and New Testament, and for which thousands will bless God after you cease from your labours -- a work from which, I doubt not, the church will derive the greatest advantage to the end of time. You, sir, have laboured, and we enter into your labours, and by them, many of Christ's ministers are far better qualified to unfold the mysteries of the Gospel to their hearers.⁴⁸

Gill had occasional correspondence with a number of American ministers. Often these were letters of inquiry for advice, especially during the trans-Atlantic extension of the baptismal controversy. He was vitally interested in the Baptist work in the colonies. He is listed among the contributors to Rhode Island College, which is now Brown University, and his will provided for the bequest of a copy of all his publications to that institution.⁴⁹

Gill's influence abroad was negligible to his influence at home. His theology had a withering effect upon the Particular Baptists of England. His belief that ministers could not invite sinners to the Saviour without interfering with the purposes of God resulted in a steady decline in the membership of Particular Baptist churches. Extension work came to a standstill. Preachers were content to expound heavy doctrinal sermons, but they were loathe to urge

⁴⁸Rippon, pp. 129-30.

⁴⁹List of Gentlemen and ladies in England who have Contributed toward endowing the College in Rhode Island ... (1768). Confirmed by letter from Miss Marion Brown, in charge of Special Collections at Brown Library.

people to repent and believe the Gospel. They were so afraid of intruding upon the work of God that they ceased seeking the conversion of souls and aimed only at preserving their dwindling congregations. They cramped themselves unnecessarily when there was no valid spiritual reason for doing so. Numerical estimates of the total number of persons attending Particular Baptist churches in Britain at mid-eighteenth century vary all the way from 5,000 to 20,000, but all are agreed that the churches gradually lost their vitality and slowly declined from year to year.⁵⁰ Although this decline coincided with the period of Gill's ascendancy, it is of course false to conclude that his influence was the only factor responsible for it. During those years all religious groups were experiencing similar recessions, but even so, Gill's theology contributed nothing toward overcoming the religious apathy of the age.

Gill's theology was cold and abstract. It lacked sufficient warmth to satisfy the hunger of human hearts, and it was remote in its relationship to the everyday affairs of men's lives. "The system of theology with which many identify his name," said Spurgeon, "has chilled many churches to their very soul, for it has led them to omit the free invitation of the Gospel and to deny that it is the duty of the sinner to believe in Jesus Christ."⁵¹ Gill's God was

⁵⁰Ivimey III, p. 279.

⁵¹Spurgeon, p. 47.

a difficult God to love; He was stern and fatalistic, and he demanded unquestioning submission to unintelligible decrees.

While Gill and his following were still preaching about the hidden decrees of God, Whitefield and Wesley began to reveal God's purposes to the multitudes. Whitefield was out preaching on the moors while Gill was shut up in his study expounding the New Testament, and Wesley was out seeking to bring the lost sheep into Christ's fold while Gill contended to his congregation that they were the elect of God. The Evangelical Revival was late in effecting the Particular Baptists because the Arminianism of Wesley prevented any relations between him and the Particular Baptist leadership. Whitefield was received more favorably, but before any noticeable effect of the awakening could be seen among Particular Baptists, it was necessary for a new generation of men to move into places of influence. The infection of Gill's hyper-Calvinism was stubborn in its resistance to the new spirit, but eventually his extreme point of view began to be tempered. The person who did the most to thaw this winter of Calvinism was Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) who, significantly, became the Pastor of the Particular Baptist congregation at Kettering, the place where Gill was born and entered the ministry.

More than any other man, Fuller brought to an end the reign of hyper-Calvinism among the great majority of Particular Baptist ministers and churches. On one occasion Fuller said, "Had matters gone on but a few years, the Baptists would have become a perfect dunghill in society."⁵² It is significant to notice that Ivimey considered the year 1779 to be "the commencement of a new era in the history of our denomination"⁵³ -- eight years after the death of John Gill.

Gill's influence was limited largely to his own denomination, and even there it was short-lived after his lifetime. It is true that his Body of Divinity held its place as a theological textbook in certain circles until well into the nineteenth century, but by that time, nearly all persons of Calvinistic persuasion had considerably modified the more harsh doctrines of his system. Gill's star never rose very high on the horizon, and in the morning of the new theological day, he was lost in the light.

Although the majority of contemporary Baptists would find Gill's theology distasteful, they would recognize and respect the strong Baptist principles he upheld. Gill was very definitely of Baptist conviction in his interpretation

⁵²Underwood, p. 164.

⁵³Ivimey IV, p. 4.

of Baptism, in his insistence upon the Bible as the sole rule of faith and practice, and in his understanding of church organization.

There are very few Baptists today who have ever heard of the name John Gill, but in the non-Conformist burying ground at Bunhill Fields, Cripplegate, there stands the following silent tribute to one who was once regarded by many Baptists of his own day as the most outstanding man in the denomination:

In this Sepulchre
 Are deposited the remains
 Of John Gill
 Professor of Sacred Theology;
 A man of unblemished reputation,
 A sincere disciple of Jesus,
 An excellent preacher of the Gospel,
 A courageous defender of the Christian Faith;
 Who,
 Adorned with piety, learning and skill,
 Was unwearied in works of prodigious labour,
 For more than fifty years.
 To obey the commands of his Great Master,
 To advance the interests of the Church,
 To promote the salvation of men,
 Impelled with unabated ardour,
 He put forth all his strength.
 He placidly fell asleep in Christ,
 The 14th day of October
 In the year of our Lord, 1771
 In the 74th year of his age.

APPENDIX A

THE REVISED AND FINAL FORM OF THE DECLARATION OF FAITH AND PRACTICE OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AT HORSLEY-DOWN

Having been enabled, through divine grace, to give up ourselves to the Lord, and likewise to one another by the will of God; we account it a duty incumbent upon us to make a declaration of our faith and practice, to the honour of Christ, and the glory of his name; knowing, that as with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, so with the mouth confession is made unto salvation -- our declaration is as follows:

I. We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the word of God, and the only rule of faith and practice.

II. We believe that there is but one only living and true God; that there are three Persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, who are equal in nature, power, and glory; and that the Son and the Holy Ghost are as truly and properly God as the Father. These three Divine Persons are distinguished from each other by peculiar relative properties; the distinguishing character and relative property of the First Person is begetting, he has begotten a Son of the same nature with Him, of whom is the express image of His Person and wherefore, He is with great propriety called the Father. The distinguishing character and relative property of the Second Person is that He is begotten and He is called the only begotten of the Father and His own proper Son, not as a son by creation as angels and men are; nor by adoption as saints are, nor by office as civil magistrates are, but by nature by the Father's eternal generation of Him in the divine nature and therefore He is truly called the Son; the distinguishing character and relative property of the Third Person is to be breathed by the Father and the Son and so proceeds from both and is very properly called the Spirit or breath of both these three distinct Persons we profess to reverence, love, and worship as the One True God.

III. We believe that, before the world began, God did elect a certain number of men unto everlasting salvation, (whom he did predestinate to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, of his own free grace, and according to the good pleasure of his will: and that, in pur-

suance of this gracious design, he did contrive and make a covenant of grace and peace with his Son Jesus Christ, on the behalf of those persons, wherein a Saviour was appointed, and all spiritual blessings provided for them; as also that their persons, with all their grace and glory, were put into the hands of Christ, and made his care and charge.

IV. We believe that God created the first man, Adam, after his own image, and in his likeness; an upright, holy, and innocent creature, capable of serving and glorifying him, and came short of the glory of God: the guilt of whose sin is imputed, and a corrupt nature derived, to all his offspring, descending from him by ordinary and natural generation: that they are by their first birth carnal and unclean, averse to all that is good, incapable of doing any, and prone to every sin; and are also by nature children of wrath, and under a sentence of condemnation, and so are subject not only to a corporal death, and involved in a moral one, commonly called spiritual, but are also liable to an eternal death, as considered in the first Adam, fallen and sinners: from all which there is no deliverance but by Christ, the second Adam.

V. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, being set up from everlasting as the Mediator of the new covenant, and he, having engaged to be the surety of his people, did, in the fulness of time, really assume human nature, and not before, neither in whole nor in part; his human soul, being a creature, existed not from eternity, but was created and formed in his body by him that forms the spirit of man within him, when that was conceived in the womb of the virgin; and so his human nature consists of a true body and a reasonable soul; both which, together, and at once; the Son of God assumed into union with his divine Person, when made of a woman, and not before; in which nature he really suffered and died as their substitute, in their room and stead, whereby he made all that satisfaction for their sins, which the law and justice of God could require, as well as made way for all those blessings, which are needful for them both for time and eternity.

VI. We believe that that eternal redemption which Christ has obtained, by the shedding of his blood, is special and particular, that is to say, that it was only intentionally designed for the elect of God, and sheep of Christ, who only share the special and peculiar blessings of it.

VII. We believe that the justification of God's elect is only by the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, without the consideration of any works of righteousness done

by them; and that the full and free pardon of all their sins and transgressions, past, present, and to come, is only through the blood of Christ, according to the riches of his grace.

VIII. We believe that the work of regeneration, conversion, sanctification, and faith, is not an act of man's free will and power, but of the mighty, efficacious, and irresistible grace of God.

IX. We believe that all those who are chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and sanctified by the Spirit, shall certainly and finally persevere, so that not one of them shall ever perish, but shall have everlasting life.

X. We believe that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust; and that Christ will come a second time to judge both quick and dead, when he will take vengeance on the wicked, and introduce his own people into his kingdom and glory, where they shall be for ever with him.

XI. We believe that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of Christ, to be continued until his second coming; and that the former is absolutely requisite to the latter; that is to say, that those only are to be admitted into the communion of the church, and to participate of all ordinances in it, who upon profession of their faith, have been baptized by immersion, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

XII. We also believe that singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, vocally, is an ordinance of the Gospel to be performed by believers; but that as to time, place, and manner, every one ought to be left to their liberty in using it.

Now all, and each of these doctrines and ordinances, we look upon ourselves under the greatest obligations to embrace, maintain, and defend; believing it to be our duty to stand fast, in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel.

And whereas we are very sensible, that our conversation, both in the world and in the church, ought to be as becometh the Gospel of Christ, we judge it our incumbent duty to walk in wisdom towards them that are without, to exercise a conscience void of offence towards God and men, by living soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

And as to our regards to each other, in our church

-communion, we esteem it our duty to walk with each other in all humility and brotherly love: to watch over each other's conversation; to stir up one another to love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as we have opportunity, to worship God according to his revealed will; and, when the case requires, to warn, rebuke, and admonish one another, according to the rules of the Gospel.

Moreover, we think ourselves obliged to sympathize with each other, in all conditions, both inward and outward, which God, in his providence, may bring us unto; as also to bear with one another's weaknesses, failings, and infirmities, and particularly to pray for one another, and that the Gospel and the ordinances thereof might be blessed to the edification and comfort of each other's souls, and for the gathering in of others to Christ, besides those who are already gathered - all which duties we desire to be found in the performance of, through the gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit, whilst we both admire and adore the grace which has given us a place and a name in God's house, better than that of sons and daughters.

APPENDIX B

AN ANSWER TO ALL WHICH THE REVEREND DOCTOR GILL HAS
PRINTED ON THE FINAL PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

BY JOHN WESLEY

1. O take away the Stone,
 Jesu the Bar remove,
Th'accursed Thing to me unknown,
 That stops thy streaming Love:
 Thy Grace is always free,
 Thou waitest to be Good,
An still thy spirit grieves for me,
 And speaks thy sprinkled Blood.

2. Ah! do not let me trust
 In Gifts and Graces past,
But lay my Spirit in the Dust,
 And stop my mouth at last.
 What Thou for me hast done,
 I can no longer plead;
Thy Truth and Faithfulness I own,
 If now Thou strike me dead.

3. Surely I once believ'd
 And felt my Sins forgiven,
Thy faithful Record I receiv'd,
 That Thou hast purchas'd Heaven
 For me, and all mankind,
 Who from their Sins would part;
The Peace of God I once cou'd find,
 The Witness in my Heart.

4. But soon the subtle Fiend
 Beguil'd my simple Mind,
Darkness with Light he knew to blend,
 Falsehood and Truth he join'd;
 Pride (he remembered well)
 Had cast him from the Skies:
By Pride the first Transgressor fell,
 And lost his Paradise.

5. Arm'd with this firey Dart
 The Enemy drew nigh,
 And preach'd to my unsettled Heart
 His bold presumptuous Lie;
 'You are secure of Heaven,
 '(The Tempter Softly says)
 'You are Elect, and once forgiven
 'Can never fall from Grace.
6. 'You never can receive
 'The Grace of God in Vain:
 'The Gift, be sure, He did not give,
 'To take it back again;
 'He cannot take it back,
 'Whether you use, or no
 'His Grace; you cannot Shipwreck make
 'Of Faith, or let it go.
7. 'You never can forget
 'Your God, or leave Him now,
 'Or once look back, if you have set
 'Your Hand unto the Plow:
 'You never can deny
 'The Lord who you hath bought,
 'Nor can your God his own pass by,
 'Tho' you receive Him not.
8. 'God is unchangeable,
 'And therefore so are you;
 'And therefore they can never fail
 'Who once his Goodness knew;
 'In Part perhaps you may,
 'You cannot wholly fall,
 'Cannot become a Castaway,
 'Like non-elected Paul.
9. 'Tho' you continue not,
 'Yet God remains the same,
 'Out of his Book He cannot blot
 'Your everlasting Name.
 'Cut off you shall not be,
 'You never shall remove,
 'Secure from all Eternity
 'In his electing Love.

10. 'If God the Seed did sow,
'He sow'd it not in vain,
'It cannot to Perfection grow,
'But it must still remain:
'Nor Cares, nor Sins can choak,
'Or make the Grace depart,
'Nor can it be by Satan took
'Out of your careless Heart.
11. 'You must for ever live,
'If of the chosen Race;
'If God did but one Talent give
'Of special, Saving Grace,
'You cannot bury it;
'He never can reprove,
'Or cast you out into the Pit
'For trampling on his Love.
12. 'God sees in you no sin;
'On his Decree depend;
'You who did in the Sp'rit begin,
'In Flesh can never end.
'You never can reject
'His Mercies or abuse,
'His great Salvation none neglect,
'And Death and Evil Chuse.
13. 'If once the Sp'rit unclean
'Out of his House is gone,
'He never more can enter in,
'Or seize you for his own;
'You need not dread the Fate
'Of Reprobates accurst,
'Or tremble lest your last Estate,
'Be worsser than the First.
14. 'Surely the righteous Man
'Can never more draw back,
'He his own Mercies never can
'With his good Works forsake;
'That he should sink to Hell
'In his Iniquity,
'God may suppose it possible
'But it can never be.

15. 'His Threatnings all are vain,
 'You fancy Him sincere,
 'But spare yourself the needless Pain,
 'And cast away your Fear.
 'He speaks with this Intent
 'To frighten you from Ill
 'With Sufferings, which He only meant
 'The Reprobates should feel.
16. 'He only meant to warn
 'The damn'd, devoted Race,
 'Back from his Ways lest they should turn
 'Who never knew his Ways;
 'He only cautions all
 'Who never came to God,
 'Not to depart from God, or fall
 'From Grace, who never stood.
17. 'His Threatenings are a Jest,
 'Or not design'd for you;
 'He only means them for the Rest,
 'And they shall find them true,
 'Who flight his Mercy's Call,
 'Which they cou'd ne'er embrace:
 'He warns th' apostates not to fall
 'From common (damning) Grace.
18. ' 'Gainst those that faithless prove
 'He shuts his Mercy'd Door
 'And whom He never once did love
 'Threatens to love no more:
 'From them He doth revoke
 'The Grace they did not share,
 'And blot the Names out of his Book
 'That ne'er were written there.
19. 'But you may rest secure,
 'And safely take your Ease,
 'If you are once in Grace, be sure
 'You always are in Grace:
 'Cast all your Fears away,
 'My Son, be of good Chear,
 'Nor mind what Paul or Peter say,
 'For you must persevere.

20. 'And did they fright the Child,
 'And tell it, it might fall?
 'Might be of its reward beguil'd,
 'And sin, and forfeit all:
 'Might to its vomit turn,
 'And wallow in the Mire,
 'And perish in its Sins, and burn
 'In everlasting Fire!
21. 'What naughty Men be they
 'To take the Children's Bread,
 'Their carnal Confidence to slay,
 'And force them to take heed!
 'With humble useless Doubt
 'The fearful Babes they fill,
 'Compell'd with Trembling to work out
 'Their own Salvation still.
22. 'Ah poor misguided Soul!
 'And did they make it weep!
 'Come, let me in my Bosom lull
 'Thy sorrows all to sleep:
 'Thine Eyes in Safety Close,
 'Secure from all Alarms,
 'And take thine undisturb'd Repose,
 'And rest within my Arms.
23. 'They shall not vex it so,
 'By bidding it take heed;
 'You need not as a Bulrush go,
 'Still bowing down your Head;
 'Your Grievs and Fears reject,
 'My other Gospel own,
 'Only believe yourself Elect,
 'And all the Work is done.
24. T'was thus the subtle Foe
 Beguild my foolish Heart,
 While weak in Faith I did not know
 His false ensnaring art:
 I listen'd to a Lie
 Which Nature lik'd so well,
 Believ'd the Soothing Fiend that I
 Could never fall - and fell.

25. The Tempter now withdrew,
 And left me free from Care,
 His own advantage well he knew;
 My Soul was in his Snare:
 Secure, and lull'd in Ease,
 Sin vex'd me now no more,
 My sorrows end, my Trouble cease,
 And all my Pangs are o'er.
26. Freed from the inward Cross,
 Of all corruption full,
 A Prophet of smooth Things I was
 To my own wretched Soul;
 Unchang'd and unrenew'd,
 Yet still I could not fall:
 Daub'd with untemper'd mortar stood
 The tottering, whited Wall.
27. My Wound I flightly heal'd,
 And quieted my Grief,
 With all the false Assurance fill'd
 Of damning Unbelief;
 One of the happy Sect
 Who scoff at Mourners poor
 That will not dream themselves Elect,
 Till they have made it sure.
28. How happier far was I,
 From Grief and Scruple free,
 Who could from all conviction fly
 To God's suppos'd Decree!
 O what a settled Peace,
 What comfort did I prove,
 And hug me in my sins, and bless
 His sweet Electing Love!
29. What if I sinn't sometimes
 In this imperfect State,
 It was not like the damning crimes
 Of a lost Reprobate;
 Sin was not Sin in me,
 God doth not blame His own,
 Doth not behold Iniquity
 In any Chosen One.

30. What if I foully fell,
 I finally could not;
 His Grace is irresistible,
 And back I must be brought:
 What if in Sin I liv'd,
 The firm Decree is past,
 It must be at my Death receiv'd.
 I must be sav'd at last.
31. How could my Folly dare
 Satan and Sin to flight?
 The Judgments of my God were far
 Above out of my Sight:
 His Wrath was not for me,
 And therefore I defied
 Mine Enemies, from Danger free,
 In self-electing Pride.
32. Not all his threaten'd Woes
 My stubborn Heart cou'd move:
 His Threatnings only were for those
 Who never knew his Love:
 He cannot take away
 His covenanted Grace,
 Tho' I rebel, and disobey,
 And mock Him to his Face.
33. He cannot me pass by,
 Or utterly reject,
 Or judge his People, or deny
 To save his own Elect;
 He swore to bring me in
 To Heaven; twere Perjury
 For God to punish me for sin,
 For God to pass by me.
34. 'Twas thus my wretched Heart
 Abus'd his patient Grace,
 Provok'd his Mercy to depart,
 His Justice to take Place:
 Unconscious of its state,
 In Death my Soul abode,
 Nor groan'd beneath its guilty Weight,
 Nor knew its Fall from God.

35. I could not be restor'd
 By pard'ning Grace renew'd
 While trampling on his Written Word
 Self-confident I stood:
 He only saves the Lost,
 Which I cou'd never be,
 I never cou'd be damn'd, but must
 Be sav'd by his Decree.
36. O My offended God,
 If now at last I see,
 That I have trampled on thy Blood,
 And done Despite to Thee,
 If I begin to wake
 Out of my deadly Sleep,
 Into thine Arms of mercy take,
 And there for ever keep.
37. I can no longer trust
 In my Abuse of Grace,
 I own Thee Merciful and Just,
 If banish'd from thy Face:
 Tho' once I surely knew,
 And felt my Sins forgiven,
 Faithful I own Thee, Lord, and true,
 If now shut out from Heaven.
38. But O! forbid it, Lord,
 Nor drive me from thy Face,
 While self-condemned, and self-abhor'd,
 I humbly sue for Grace:
 For thine own Mercy's Sake
 My guilty Soul release,
 And now my Pardon give me back,
 And bid me die in Peace.

FINIS

APPENDIX C

PERSEVERANCE: A POEM IN REPLY TO THE REVEREND
MISTER WESLEY'S POETICAL PERFORMANCE

Was ever such an empty Answer seen?
So weak, so wicked, foreign, false, and mean?
The author only beats the air in vain,
And aims at something which he can't explain.
In fine, the whole this mighty Piece affords,
In Spite, and Pride, and strange unmeaning Words:
Pleas'd with perverting sacred Writ, to shew,
Salvation's not of Grace, but what we do.
He'd have us think it comes most richly fraught,
In Answer to what Dr. Gill has wrote:
Thanks to the Title, or 'tis understood
As well of Little John and Robin-Hood.

Doctor, no need to turn those Darts aside,
They either die in air, or fly full wide;
Truth stands unshaken, all this Babble's vain,
While Sion's King, will Sion's Cause maintain;
He's chose her for himself, his Dwelling's there,
And can't forget the Children of his Care.

Wesley, if thy presumptuous Lye prevail,
Wisdom may err, and mighty Pow'r may fail:
Grace may deceive the Person where 'tis wrought,
And all that God has said may stand for naught.
If there's a Breach in Everlasting Love,
Then Faith is vain, nor are they safe above.
This Truth should never, never be forgot,
That Jacob's God's a God that Changeth not.

You once believ'd, you say, where you begin,
That heav'n is bought for those who leave their Sin;
If your Foundation cannot stand the Test,
There's Room to doubt the Truth of all the rest.
How Heaven is purchas'd you should first explain,
Then, by what Pow'r vile men from sin refrain;
A Saviour shed his Blood for Sin, not Heav'n,
To purchase Persons, not for Blessings given;
Where Satisfaction's rightly understood,
Persons, not Things, must bear the price of Blood;
And all those Blessings added can't but be
The unfeigned Gift of the Eternal Three.

Is nothing certain til I leave my Sin?
 Will God not love me till I first begin?
 And will that Love decline as mine grows cold?
 Or can he hate me young, and love me old?
 Does man's Obedience Happiness obtain,
 Then all's of Debt, and Christ has died in vain;
 Then Saviour, Surety, Helper, Sacrifice,
 Are empty Sounds, and mere Absurdities
 Is this glad Tidings? Where can I depend?
 If Christ is wanting, I have ne'er a Friend.

Sir, I suppose your meaning should be this;
 To part with Sin is not to do amiss:
 Then why this Confidence, this Spite and Pride,
 Those many sacred Texts thus villified?
 And why this Devil, with a sneer to say,
 Who wrongs my child, who takes its Bread away?
 Boast not Perfection, since the Case is thus,
 Except 'tis perfect blind, or something worse.

But, O! how impious, how profoundly base!
 To talk of Sin as Consequence of Grace!
 That those who live by Faith may as they please,
 Trample on Love, and live in carnal ease;
 As tho' the Grace of God does not constrain
 The Hearts of those belov'd to love again.

This is the Doctrine which the Tempter brought,
 Read and consider, tremble at the Thought!
 "If thou're the Son of God then fear no Ill,
 "What he has said he'll certainly fulfill;
 "He's bid the Angels watch and guard thee round,
 "Neglect all Rule, go headlong to the Ground.

The Ways of God he never once put in;
 Here read thysself (the Soul that's safe may sin;)
 Choose to be holy thou would set aside,
 Thus he attack'd the Bridegroom, you the Bride.
 O! black Ingratitude from Hell below!
 The grateful Christian cannot argue so.

What if my Prince should kindly condescend
 To let me know he's always been my Friend;
 Paid off the many scores that I should pay,
 And sends me fresh Provisions Day by Day.
 Can I from hence such vile conclusions draw,
 To hate his Love, and set at naught his Law.
 No, rather say, 'twould make me speak his praise
 And strive to serve him all my future Days.

That Soul that's humbled with a Sense of Sin,
 And feels, and loathes its rottenness within;
 That knows its helpless case, and does confess

He's nothing of his own but Emptiness,
 And by Divine Assistance can behold
 More worthy in Christ than Pyramids of Gold.
 Tho' Sin and Satan often make him doubt,
 This bruised Reed shall stand the Tempest out:
 A Glimpse of Love shall clear him in the Way,
 And Strength be given equal to his Day.
 If the gloomy Pit where Horrors dwell,
 And he concludes himself next Door to Hell,
 His God shall pleasant Paths to him restore,
 And make him sing a song unknown before.
 That mighty Arm that calm'd the raging Sea,
 Shall guard him round, and guide him on his Way.
 Thus, thus the Christian Man is toss'd about,
 Sometimes his Faith prevails, and sometimes doubt;
 Though various Changes may attend his Frame,
 His State shall evermore abide the same.

When in his Light they eye the golden Chain,
 And can the Order of each Link explain,
 From God's Fore-knowledge down thro' Time and then,
 Ascending up to Deity again;
 Each attribute concurs to make them bless'd,
 Sav'd to be call'd, and call'd to endless Rest.
 They with searphic Views will sweetly trace
 The glorious Heights and Depths of mighty Grace;
 To see what was laid up in Christ their Head,
 In Adam was not lost or forfeited;
 And while they lay i'th Ruins of the Fall,
 Eternal Arms were underneath them all;
 They being Objects of that Ancient Love,
 Their Fall in Adam could not that remove:
 And as th'Effect of Union in their Lord,
 He bids them live, and they obey his Word:
 They see as Adam sunk them into Sin,
 The Life and Death of Christ has made them clean.
 Then how secure they stood e'er Time begun,
 And now eternal Settlements do run:
 If they are Children then they're Heirs of all,
 From him they did not, will not, cannot fall.
 As by Adoption they have this Relation,
 The Nature's given in Regeneration;
 As by the first they'r Sons to the Creator,
 The latter as th'Elect gives Children's Nature.
 Here they may stand, and wonder, and adore,
 How God could love them welt'ring in their Gore.

When by th'Eternal Spirit thus they're lead,
 To read their Interest is a risen Head;
 What glaring Glory ravishes their Eyes,
 In every Providence new Wonders rise;
 If they're surrounded with afflictions here,

Or Bread and Water be their only Chear
 Each needful Want he'll readily supply,
 Whose Ear is open to the Raven's Cry;
 He sends them earthly, sends them heavenly Food,
 And makes each Crooked Thing to work for good.

When they're transplanted in the Realms Above,
 What Views they'll have of Everlasting Love;
 When put Perfection on they'll plainly see
 What was the Business of Eternity,
 And sing the great contrivance of the boundless Three.

Wesley, no more advance this wretched scheme
 Nor plume thyself by robbing the Supreme.
 No more exalt proud man at the Expense
 Of God's Foreknowledge and Omnipotence.

Sir, in your next will you vouchsafe to show,
 Who leads and teaches Ephraim to go?
 Who brings to Zion with a tender Care?
 Who keeps the Wheels of Love in Motion there,
 And makes him joyful in the House of Prayer
 Who often puts to Flight contending Foes
 Who stays the rough Wind when the East Wind blows
 Who makes him oft rejoice in Tribulation,
 And hope and trust alone in God's Salvation.
 Would God bestow on upon his quickening Rays,
 You'd own his mighty Pow' er and sing his Praise.
 To Moles and Batts you'd cast your Idols then,
 And give to him what now you give to man.

FINIS

APPENDIX D

HONORARY DOCTOR OF DIVINITY DEGREE FROM MARISCHAL
COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY AT ABERDEEN

Nos Gymnasiarcha, Artium et Linguarum Professores,
Moderatores Universitatis Marischallanae Aberdeensis
-- Omnibus Literarum Studiosis S. --

Quum viri olim prudentissimi, Academiarum
Collegiorumque fundatores, eum in finem gradus quos
vocant, Academicos excogitârunt et instituerint, ut
bene postea de literis merituri haud ignobilia virtu-
tis et ingenii praemia nanciscerentur: id curae
videtur Academiarum cujuscunqueaevi Moderatorum fidei
commissum, ut eximios hosce viros dispicerent, et con-
gruis honoribus, pro cujusque doctrina et meritis,
ornarent: quumque Nobis cempertum sit, virum reveren-
dum Joannem Gill A.M.* Ecclesiae apud Londinenses pas-
torem, praeclaros in Sacris Literis, Linguis Orienta-
libus et Antiquitatibus Judiacis progressus fecisse,
eisque praeditum esse moribus, qui virum pium pro-
bumque deceant ac ornent. Propterea sciatis Nos Gym-
nasiarcham et Moderatores supra dictos, Eum summo con-
sensu, S.S. Theologiae Doctorem creâsse et constituisse,
omnibusque et singulis istius gradus privilegiis
donâsse, Ipsumque veris ubique Scientiae et Virtutis

*Gill did not have another degree.

cultoribus sedulo commendatum habere Nos, qui
chirographis nostris publicoque Universitatis sigillo
Diploma hocce muniendum curivamus.

Datum Aberdeae
Ex Universitate Marischallana,
Octavo Kal. Aprilis,
A. AE. C. M.DCC.XLIIX.

Joa. Osborn, Gymnasiarcha.
Robertus Pollock, S.S.T.P.
Ja. Donaldson, L.L.O.O.P.
Francis Skene, P.P.
Dav. Vernor, LL. D.&P.P.
Joannes Stewart, Math. P.
David Fordyce, P.P.
Ja. Gordon, Med. P.

THE BIBLIOGRAPHY

SOURCES CONSULTED

I. BACKGROUND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbey, C.J., and J.H. Overton. The English Church in the Eighteenth Century. London, 1887.
- Brinton, Crane. Ideas and Men. New York (Printice-Hall), 1950.
- Burrage, Champlin. The Early English Dissenters. 2 vols., Cambridge, 1912.
- Cragg, G.R. From Puritanism to the Age of Reason. Cambridge (University Press), 1950.
- Cramp, J.M. Baptist History. London, 1871.
- Crosby, Thomas. The History of the English Baptists. 4 vols., London, 1740.
- Ivimey, Joseph. A History of the English Baptists. 4 vols., London, 1811-1840.
- McGlothlin, W.J. Baptist Confessions of Faith. London, 1911.
- Overton, John, and Frederic Relton. The English Church from the Accession of George I to the End of the Eighteenth Century. London, 1906.
- Rippon, John. A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Reverend John Gill, D.D. London, 1800.
- Spurgeon, C.H. The Metropolitan Tabernacle: Its History and Work. London, 1876.
- Stephen, Leslie. English Thought in the Eighteenth Century. 2nd ed., 2 vols., London, 1881.
- Torbet, Robert G. A History of the Baptists. Philadelphia (The Judson Press), 1953.

- Treveleyan, G.M. English Social History. London (Longmans Green and Co.), 1942.
- Underwood, A.C. A History of the English Baptists. London (Kingsgate Press), 1947.
- Vedder, Henry. A Short History of the Baptists. A new ed., Philadelphia, 1907.
- Whiting, C.E. Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution. London (Macmillan), 1931.
- Whitley, W.T. The Baptists of London. London, 1929.
- Calvinism in England. London (Kingsgate Press), n.d.
- A History of British Baptists. 2nd. ed., London (Kingsgate Press), 1932.
- Willey, Basil. The Eighteenth Century Background. London (Chatto and Windus), 1950.

II. PRIMARY SOURCES

A. Books by John Gill:

- Gill, John. The Cause of God and Truth. A new ed., London, 1855.
- A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity. A new ed., 3 vols., London, 1796.
- A Dissertation Concerning the Antiquity of the Hebrew Language. London, 1767.
- An Exposition of the New Testament. 3 vols., London, 1746-1748.
- An Exposition of the Old Testament. 6 vols., London, 1757-1766.
- An Exposition of the Song of Solomon. London, 1728.

----- . The Prophecies of the Old Testament
Respecting the Messiah, Considered and Proved
to be Literally Fulfilled in Jesus. London,
 1728.

B. Pamphlets and Treatises by John Gill:

Gill, John. The Ancient Mode of Baptism by Immersion.
 London, 1727.

----- . Answer to Addington. London, 1746.

----- . An Answer to the Birmingham Dialogue
Writer, Part I. London, 1737.

----- . An Answer to the Birmingham Dialogue
Writer, Part II. London, 1739.

----- . An Answer to a Welsh Clergyman's Twenty
Arguments in Favor of Infant Baptism. 2nd ed.,
 1753.

----- . Antipaedobaptism; or, Infant-sprinkling
an Innovation. London, 1753.

----- . The Argument from Apostolic Tradition.
 2nd ed., London, 1753.

----- . A Declaration of the Faith and Practice
of the Church of Christ in Carter-Lane. London,
 1771.

----- . A Discourse on Prayer. 2nd ed., London,
 1751.

----- . A Discourse on Singing of Psalms. 2nd
 ed., London, 1751.

----- . The Dissenter's Reasons for Separating
from the Church of England. London, 1753.

----- . A Dissertation Concerning the Baptism of
Jewish Proselytes. London, 1771.

----- . A Dissertation Concerning the Eternal Son-
ship of Christ. London, 1773.

- . The Divine Right of Infant Baptism Examined. London, 1749.
- . The Doctrine of God's Everlasting Love to His Elect, and Their Eternal Union with Christ. 3rd. ed., London, 1752.
- . The Doctrine of Justification. London, 1756.
- . The Duty of a Pastor to his People. London, 1734.
- . The Doctrine of Predestination Stated. 3rd ed., London, 1752.
- . The Doctrine of the Saints' Final Perseverance, Asserted and Vindicated. 3rd ed., London, 1754.
- . An Essay on the Original of Funeral Sermons. London, 1729.
- . Levi's Urim and Thurmin Found with Christ. London, 1735.
- . The Moral Nature and Fitness of Things Considered. London, 1738.
- . The Necessity of Good Works to Salvation. London, 1737.
- . The Quiet and Easy Passage of Christ's Purchased People. 2nd ed., London, 1763.
- . A Reply to a Defense of the Divine Right of Infant Baptism. London, 1755.
- . A Reply to Mr. Clark's Defense of the Divine Right of Infant Baptism. Boston, 1754.
- . Reply to the Reverend Micaiah Towgood, upon Apostolic Tradition in Reference to Christian Baptism. 3rd. ed., London, 1815.
- . Some Strictures on Mr. Bostwick's Fair and Rational Vindication of the Right of Infants to the Ordinance of Baptism. London, 1765.
- . Treatise on the Doctrine of the Trinity. 2nd ed., London, 1752.

- . Truth Defended. London, 1736.
- . A Vindication of a Book, entitled 'The Cause of God and Truth,' Part IV. London, 1740.
- C. Sermons by John Gill:
- Gill, John. The Agreement of the Old Testament and New Testament. London, 1756.
- . Attendance in Places of Religious Worship. London, 1757.
- . Baptism a Divine Commandment to be Observed. London, 1765.
- . Christ, the Ransom Found. London, 1754.
- . Christ the Saviour from the Tempest. London, 1737.
- . A Collection of Sermons and Tracts. 2 vols., London, 1773.
- . A Collection of Sermons and Tracts. 3 vols., London, 1814.
- . The Doctrine of the Cherubim Opened and Explained. London, 1764.
- . The Doctrine of Grace Cleared from the Charge of Licentiousness. 2nd ed., London, 1751.
- . The Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness without Works, Asserted and Proved. London, 1784.
- . The Doctrine of the Wheels, in the Vision of Ezekiel, Opened and Explained. London, 1765.
- . Faith in God and His Word, the Establishment and Prosperity of His People. 2nd. ed., London, 1754.
- . The Faithful Minister of Christ Crowned. London, 1767.
- . The Form of Sound Words to be Held Fast. London, 1766.

- . The Free Grace of God Exalted in the
Apostle Paul. London, 1765.
- . The Fulness of the Mediator. London, 1736.
- . The Glorious State of the Saints in Heaven.
3rd. ed., London, 1775.
- . The Glory of the Church in the Latter Day.
3rd ed., London, 1761.
- . The Glory of God's Grace Displayed in its
Abounding over the Abounding of Sin. London,
1764.
- . The Head of the Serpent Bruised by the Seed
of the Woman. London, 1733.
- . Job's Creed: or, Confession of Faith. Lon-
don, 1733.
- . The Law Established by the Gospel. 2nd ed.,
London, 1756.
- . The Law in the Hand of Christ. London, 1761.
- . The Mutual Gain of Christ and Christians in
Their Life and Death. 3rd ed., London, 1768.
- . The Necessity of Christ's Making Satisfac-
tion. London, 1766.
- . Neglect of Fervant Prayer Complained of.
London, 1754.
- . The Practical Improvement of the Watchman's
Answer to the Question, What of the Night. 2nd
ed., London, 1752.
- . The Resurrection of the Dead. London, 1750.
- . The Scriptures the Only Guide in Matters of
Religion. London, 1750.
- . A Sermon Occasioned by the death of A. Brine.
London, 1745.
- . A Sermon Occasioned by the death of B.
Seward. London, 1753.

- . A Sermon Occasioned by the death of Mr. Ed Ludlow. London, 1759.
- . A Sermon on the death of Elizabeth Gill. London, 1738.
- . A Sermon on the death of Samuel Wilson. London, 1750.
- . The Superior Happiness of the Righteous Dead to that of Living Saints. London, 1763.
- . The Sure Performance of Prophecy. London, 1755.
- . The Watchman's Answer. London, 1750.
- . The Work of a Gospel Minister Recommended to Consideration. London, 1763.

D. Records and Manuscripts.

- The Church Record Book of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, ed. John Gill 1740-1770.
- The Church Record Book of the Fuller Memorial Baptist Church, Kettering, Northamptonshire.
- Documents of the Particular Baptist Fund. Baptist Union Building, London.
- The Kiffin MSS. Regent Park College, Oxford. See Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society. Vol. 1.

III. SECONDARY SOURCES

- A.B. Unity Recommended in a letter to Gill. London, 1746.
- [Brekel?] Paedobaptism, or, a Defense of Infant Baptism in Point of Antiquity. London, 1753.
- Burrows, Millar. Outline of Biblical Theology. Philadelphia (Westminster Press), 1951.

- Burt, Job. Some Doctrines in the Supralapsarian Scheme Impartially Examined. London, 1736.
- Calvin, John. A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed Hugh Thomson Kerr, Jr. Philadelphia (Presbyterian Board of Christian Education), 1939.
- Chandler, Samuel. The Necessary and Immutable Difference between Moral Good and Evil. London, 1738.
- Clark, Peter. A Defense of the Divine Right of Infant Baptism in Reply to Gill's 'Divine Right' ... Boston, 1752.
- Cobbold, S. A Reply to the Dissenter's Reasons for Separating from the Church of England. London, 1804.
- Collins, Anthony. The Scheme of Literal Prophecy Considered. London, 1726.
- Consistent Christian Samuel Bourne . A Dialogue between a Baptist and a Churchman, Part I. London, 1739.
- , A Dialogue between a Baptist and a Churchman, Part II. London, 1739.
- Craner, Thomas. A Grain of Gratitude ("a sermon occasioned by the death of ... the Reverend John Gill"). London, 1771.
- Crisp, Tobias. Christ Alone Exalted ... being the Complete Works of Tobias Crisp, ed. John Gill. 4th ed., London, 1791.
- Culross, James. Hanserd Knollys. London, 1895.
- Dakin, Arthur. Calvinism. Philadelphia (Westminster) 1946.
- Davis, R. Hymns. Preface by John Gill. London, 1748.
- [Fellows, S. ?] An Elegy on the death of John Gill. London, 1771.
- Elliot, R. Dipping not Baptizing ... wherein Dr. Gill's Arguments ... are Considered. London, 1787.
- Fox, Charles. "Two Speeches Delivered in the House of Commons"; Political Tracts. Vol. 1782-1826.

- [Gurney, Thomas] Perseverance; a Poem in Reply to the Reverend Mr. Wesley. London, 1755.
- Harrison, A.W. Arminianism. London (Duckworth), 1937.
- Hart, R. Dr. Gill's Reasons for Separating from the Church of England Calmly Considered. London, 1801.
- Hervey, James. Theron and Aspasio. 5th ed., vol. 3, London, 1767.
- Heywood, Henry. Defense of Dr. Whitby's Treatise ... against the Late Attempts of Mr. John Gill. London, 1740.
- Hodge, Charles. Systematic Theology. 3 vols., London, 1874.
- Hussey, Joseph. God's Operations of Grace but no Offers of Grace. 3rd ed., London, 1792.
- J.P. and B.W. The Manner of Baptizing with Water. London, 1726.
- Maurice, Matthew. The Manner of Baptizing with Water Cleared Up from the Word of God and Right Reason. London, 1726.
- Mayo, Henry. Six Letters to a Candid Antipaedobaptist. London, 1764.
- The True Scripture Doctrine of ... Christian Baptism; with some strictures on Dr. Gill's sentiments on the moral law. London, 1766.
- Mullins, E.Y. and H.W. Tribble. The Baptist Faith. Nashville (Southern Baptist Sunday School Board), 1935.
- Price, Seymour. "Dr. Gill's Confession of 1729," The Baptist Quarterly. vol. 4, 1728-29.
- Proposals by the Philadelphia Baptist Association for printing ... Dr. Gill's Exposition of the Old and New Testaments. British Museum. 1780.
- Skepp, John. Divine Energy. 3rd ed., London, 1815.
- Spilsbury, John. God's Ordinance, the Saint's Privilege.
- Stennett, Samuel. The Victorious Christian Receiving the Crown. London, 1771.

- Stinnett, Joseph. Rabshakeh's Retreat. London, 1745.
- Taylor, Abraham. An Address to Young Students in Divinity. London, 1739.
- . The Doctrine of Free Grace Vindicated from the Charge of Licentiousness. 2nd ed., Glasgow, 1773.
- . The Insufficiency of Natural Religion. Boston, 1755.
- The Thirty-nine Articles ("The Faith, Doctrine, and Religion professed and protected in the Realme of England ..."). London, 1633.
- Wallin, Benjamin. The Address at the Interment of Gill's Sacred Remains, ed. J.A. Jones. London, 1852.
- Wesley, John. An Answer to All which the Reverend Dr. Gill has printed on the Final Perseverance of the Saints. London, 1754.
- . Predestination Calmly Considered; Wesley's Works, 3rd ed., vol X, London, 1830.
- . Serious Thoughts upon the Perseverance of the Saints; Wesley's Works, 3rd ed., vol. X, London, 1830.
- Whiston, W. A Supplement to Mr. Whiston's Late Essay toward Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament. London, 1723.
- Whitby, Daniel. A Discourse on the Five Points, 2nd ed., London, 1735.
- Wilbur, E.M. A History of Unitarianism. Cambridge, Mass. (Harvard Press), 1952.
- William of Orange. The Declaration of His Highness William Henry. The Hague, 1688.
- Wilmshurst, Cyril. "Early History of Our Church (V)"; The Sword and the Trowel (Publication of Spurgeon's Tabernacle) No. 1047, vol. 88.
- Witsius, Hermann. The Economy of the Covenants. 2 vols., trans. by William Crookshank. Edinburgh, 1804.
- [_____] A Letter to Dr. Gill, author of Dissenter's Reasons'. London, 1805.

IV. REFERENCE BOOKS

The Baptist Encyclopedia. 2 vols., ed. William Cathcart.
Philadelphia, 1881.

Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics. Vol. IV., ed.
by James Hastings. Edinburgh, 1908.

Holy Bible. King James Version.

The Volume Library. 1 vol. (Dictionary). ed. by
Richard Webster. New York (Educators Association),
1953.