

***The***  
***Theology***  
***of***  
***John***  
***Charles***  
***RYLE***

**THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN CHARLES RYLE**

by

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# 'n OPSOMMING VAN DIE PROEFSKRIF

Hierdie proefskrif is 'n studie van die teologiese sienswyse van 'n vername Victoriaanse evangeliese Anglikaan, Biskop John Charles Ryle. Die Biskop se eie ekstensiewe werke, wat ongeveer sewe duisend bladsye beslaan, is die hoof bron wat vir hierdie studie gebruik is.

Ryle se werke is meesal geleentheids, pastorale, en evangelistiese stukke, maar is sò deurtrek met teologiese belange dat 'n sistematiese teologie byna daaruit opgestel kan word. Die metode wat in hierdie proefskrif aangeneem word is dus om Ryle se werke te bestudeer volgens die tradisionele teologiese loci en om sy begrip van elkeen van hulle te analiseer. Die studie poog ook om hierdie analiese te maak in die lig van die historiese, toeologiese en kerklike agtergrond van sy werke, veral omdat Ryle gereëld met die uiteenlopende aspekte van die Victoriaanse godsdienstige denke gereageer het.

Die mees ekstensiewe studies in hierdie proefskrif hou verband met Ryle se uiteensetting van die kenmerkende beklemtonings van die Evangeliese leer, nl. die Inspirasie en Outoriteit van die Bybel, die bederflikheid van die mens, die Versoening, en die Soteriologiese en Heiligmakende werk van die Heilige Gees. Ook ander belangrike besprekingspunte is die sakramente, waarin Ryle hom in 'n sterk polemiëk uitlaat teen die Anglo-Katolieke van sy tyd, asook die Dogma van die Kerk.

Die proefskrif beklemtoon sekere eienskappe van Ryle se teologie, veral die Bybelse grondslag, tradisionele ortodoksie, evangeliese leer en gematigde Calvinisme.

'n Interessante kenmerk van Ryle se werk is sy polemiëk, wat teen die verskynende liberale teoloë en die toenemende invloedryke Anglo-Katolieke gemik is.

Ons neem ook kennis van Ryle se manier van aanbieding, insluitend sy eenvoudige uitdrukkinge, sterk pastorale toepassing, en sy didaktiese metode van inprenting deur herhaling.

Die proefskrif eindig met 'n samevatting van sy werk, 'n beskrywing van die karakter daarvan en 'n aanduiding van die belangrikheid van Ryle vir ons vandag.

# PRECIS OF THE THESIS

This thesis is a study of the theological views of a leading Victorian evangelical Anglican, Bishop John Charles Ryle. The main sources for the study are the bishop's extensive writings, which run to some seven thousand pages.

Ryle's writings, for the most part, are occasional, pastoral and evangelistic, but they are suffused with theological concern, to the extent that a "systematic theology" can almost be compiled from them. Because of this, the method adopted in this work is to study Ryle's writings according to the traditional theological "loci," and to analyse his understanding of each of them.

The study also seeks to make the analysis in the light of the historical theological and ecclesiastical background to his writings, particularly as Ryle frequently interacted with the various disparate elements that comprised the Victorian religious scene.

The most extensive studies in this thesis relate to Ryle's exposition of the distinctive emphases of Evangelicalism, viz. the Inspiration and Authority of Scripture, human depravity, the Atonement, and the saving and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Other important areas are the sacraments, in which Ryle engages in a strong polemic against the Anglo-Catholics of his day, and the doctrine of the Church.

The thesis emphasises some characteristics of Ryle's theology, in particular its biblical basis, traditional orthodoxy, evangelicalism and moderate Calvinism.

An interesting feature of Ryle's work is his polemic, which is directed against the newly emerging liberals, and the increasingly influential Anglo-Catholics.

We also take note of Ryle's style of presentation, including his simplicity of expression, strong pastoral application, and his didactic method of inculcation by repetition.

The thesis concludes with a resume of his work, a description of its character, together with a constructive critique and evaluation, and an indication of Ryle's importance for our own day.



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## INTRODUCTION

This work, an extended study of the theology of Bishop Ryle, is in some ways a sequel to an earlier dissertation on the writings of Ryle, in which the bishop's written works were examined against the background of theological and ecclesiastical developments in the Church of England in the Nineteenth century, in order to expound their general characteristics, motivation and purpose.<sup>(1)</sup> Ryle's works emerge, in such a study, as broadly evangelical, moderately Calvinistic and distinctively Anglican. However, it must be stressed that this present thesis is emphatically not a mere re-working or embellishment of the earlier work, and apart from the first two chapters, which reproduce a biographical sketch and the general religious background of the Victorian era, from the previous dissertation, there are only scattered references to the earlier work.

This thesis moves into entirely new ground, in that it is an extended analysis of the theology expressed in the works of this very characteristically Victorian Anglican, not in broad terms, but with reference to his understanding of each of the major 'loci' of Systematic Theology. At the beginning of each chapter there is a quotation from one of the Reformed Confessions on the subject under discussion, so that Ryle's theological position may be seen against the backdrop of traditional protestant orthodoxy. However, at this point, the question may be asked whether it is correct to speak of the theological works of a writer who, as a rule, carefully eschewed the use of distinctively 'theological' language, and who always sought to write simply, pointedly, and practically, for a wide public, most of whom were theologically unsophistica-

ted. Indeed, a recent writer, generally sympathetic to the Evangelical Party in the nineteenth century, has gone so far as to say that ‘...Bishop Ryle wrote pungently in his books as in his tracts, but he was not a substantial theologian’<sup>(2)</sup>, no doubt having in mind such men as the leaders of parties in the theological battles of the time, Liddon, Maurice, and Dean Church, and the editor and contributors to *Essays and Reviews*. To these plausible objections two justifying responses are offered. Firstly, while we would not pretend that Ryle was to any great extent an original contributor to English theological thought, and while it cannot be denied that he viewed contemporary theological developments with misgiving and even, on occasion with hostility, it is nevertheless true that his writings are suffused with deep theological commitment, in language which is both unambiguous and unequivocal. Thus, when we speak of Ryle’s theology, we are referring to the theological system which he so enthusiastically espoused, and which he sought so faithfully to expound. Secondly, although it is true that the bishop wrote simply and directly, this was not, in our opinion, because his grasp of the issues was superficial. His academic prowess at Oxford University, and the breadth of reading disclosed in his *Expository Notes on the Gospels* are two clear witnesses to his genuine erudition.<sup>(3)</sup> However, as Toon and Smout have shown, Ryle deliberately ‘.. dropped the ornate manner of preaching (and) .. cultivated .. a simple but powerful style of his own.’<sup>(4)</sup> This simplicity of style is undoubtedly carried over into his written work, as has been amply demonstrated in our earlier study.<sup>(5)</sup> It is true that Ryle sometimes omits complicating factors in a debate, lest they detract from his overall aim, but

even in such cases he usually makes reference to them. However, it is necessary to remember that Ryle's theological writings are generally occasional, pastoral, and, often, polemical and therefore not all areas of systematic theology are covered in his works. His main concerns are Scripture, Human Depravity, Soteriology and the Sacraments, and we will follow this emphasis. However, he does make reference to other issues, sometimes fleetingly, sometimes incidentally, and we will consider these also. As to the method adopted in this thesis, the plan followed is to take each of the major 'loci' of Systematic Theology in turn and to allow the bishop 'to speak for himself' on the subject. There is a tendency in some works on Church History to classify historical figures on the basis of their attachment to a particular ecclesiastical party, and thus we are in danger of losing the distinctiveness of an individual's contribution. We therefore make no apology for the lengthy quotations used, as these provide the real foundation for a proper evaluation of Ryle's work. We then attempt an evaluation, in which we indicate, where necessary, any reason for a particular emphasis or tendency. Because communication is always dynamic, Ryle can often be seen to be responding, in his writings, to secular and religious developments; indeed it is not too much to say that, of all the prominent religious writers of his day, none has less of the 'ivory tower' mentality than Bishop Ryle. It is the writer's contention that the contemporary church can learn a great deal from J.C.Ryle, not least because he provides a practical illustration of the importance of a consistent, full-orbed theology as a basis for an effective evangelistic and pastoral ministry. His work stands in contrast to much of

today's evangelistic literature, which is marred by superficiality and, often, by sensationalism and minimal doctrinal content. In addition, Ryle harnessed his theology to a simple and direct method of presentation, and - to use a phrase describing C.S.Lewis' gift - "he made righteousness readable." (In our day, those evangelistic works which avoid the Scylla of superficiality often are swallowed up by the Charybdis of theological esotericity). It is intended that these attractive features in Ryle's work should be noted at appropriate points in the study, in order that we may be instructed by them. Any work of this character, where the deepest springs of thought are involved, a totally objective (i.e. 'neutral') approach is not possible. However, although the writer is clearly sympathetic to Ryle's position, an attempt has been made to be critical, and alert to his shortcomings. At the same time, Ryle's contribution must be assessed in terms of its value to his contemporaries as well as its value to today's church, and the criticisms of enlightened hindsight are not always helpful.

# Chapter 1

## A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

### 1 INTRODUCTION

“A Victorian of the Victorians”; thus Marcus Loane described Ryle in his short biography.<sup>(1)</sup> It is an apt description, for Ryle attained his majority in the year of the queen’s accession, and died within a few months of the new century, less than a year before the end of Victoria’s long reign.

### 2 EARLY LIFE

John Charles Ryle was born on 10th May, 1816<sup>(2)</sup>, into a home that provided both wealth and security. He was educated at Eton and Oxford, and excelled both academically (he obtained an outstanding “First Class” degree in 1837) and on the sports-field, where he captained the University cricket XI for two years.

### 3 CONVERSION AND CALLING

1837 was a year of crisis for Ryle. Not only was it the occasion of his great scholastic achievement, it was also the time when, after “some months of inward conflict”<sup>(3)</sup> he entered into an experience of evangelical conversion, and became an earnest and active Christian. On leaving Oxford, the young graduate was preparing for a professional career, and as an able speaker was much in demand at both political and religious gatherings. (He spoke as a Tory at the former and as an evangelical at the latter). However his hopes and aspirations were shattered in 1841 when his father’s bankruptcy brought the whole family from affluence to poverty, almost within a day. Ryle never



forgot this traumatic experience; it was a humiliation that, on his own testimony, he recalled “every single day...for thirty-two years...”<sup>(4)</sup>, and presumably, for the rest of his life. Although outwardly he appeared to bear the loss with surprising equanimity, in fact he came close to despair. All the doors to a prosperous future were now closed to him, and he was at a loss to know which way to turn. But now a door opened that was to transform his life. Unexpectedly, he received an invitation to a curacy under the Rectorship of Rev W Gibson, and in view of his parlous situation he reluctantly came to the conclusion that “God had cut him off from other prospects so as to shut him up to this special calling”.<sup>(5)</sup> Although Ryle himself admitted that he entered the ministry because he felt that there was no other financially viable alternative, there is no doubt that afterwards he saw the hand of the Lord in the ordering of events.<sup>(6)</sup>

#### **4 MINISTRY FROM 1841 TO 1880**

Prior to his elevation to the episcopal bench in 1880, Ryle’s ministry falls naturally into three periods. From 1841 to 1844 he laboured at the small village of Exbury, and then the larger parish of St. Thomas’ in Winchester. In both of these posts he exercised an effective ministry, although he did not at this stage enter on his written ministry.

In 1844 he entered upon his long labours at Helmingham. While there, he married, and after the early death of his wife in 1847, married again in 1850. It was during this period that Ryle began to make his mark in Evangelical circles. He was much in demand as a preacher and lecturer, and began to devote more time to writing. The publication of his tracts, of which literally

millions were distributed<sup>(7)</sup>, dates from this time, but his most valuable written works of the 1850's were undoubtedly his *“Expository Thoughts”* on the gospels. Shortly after the death of his second wife in 1860, Ryle, who had completely alienated the Squire of Helmingham, left the village, accepting the living of Stradbroke, where he remained until 1880.

At Stradbroke the future bishop's ministry blossomed, and some of his most useful literary work belongs to this period. He had married a third time, and this happy union with a wife who was admirably suited to him, brought a measure of peace and felicity to a man whose previous years had had more than their fair share of sorrow. It was at this time also that Ryle emerged as the un-disputed leader of the Evangelicals in the Church of England.<sup>(8)</sup>

## **5 BISHOP OF LIVERPOOL 1880 TO 1900**

In 1880, Ryle was appointed first bishop of the new diocese of Liverpool. From the outset, the new bishop made it clear that his new position would not mean the slightest diminution of his evangelical principles. “I come among you” he said to the Bishopric Committee, “a Protestant and an Evangelical”<sup>(9)</sup>, and he chose as a motto for the diocese the text “Thy Word is Truth”<sup>(10)</sup>. Bishop Ryle held his new position for twenty years, up until a few months of his death. Although there were many criticisms, it may fairly be said that Ryle proved to be an effective bishop, who saw steady growth in his see, both in respect of an increase in the number of clergy, and in the building of new churches. Under his leadership, the clergy and lay-workers embarked on a ministry of aggressive evangelism, and Ryle was not averse to daring innovation in pursuing this policy. The most important of his written works

during this period were his exposition of the evangelical position in the Church of England "*Principles for Churchmen*"; his historical work "*Light from Old Times*"; and the printing of his various "*Charges and Addresses*"; although this last volume was actually collated and published only in 1903. His resignation from the post that he had filled with such distinction took effect on 1st March 1900, and three months later, on 10th June, he passed to his eternal rest.

## Chapter 2

# THE RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF THE VICTORIAN ERA

### 1 INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic process of communication, reception is as vital as transmission. Bishop Ryle's theology was a response to, and dependent upon, in no small measure, the religious beliefs and practices of his day. Further, his theology was expressed in the milieu of nineteenth century Anglicanism, with its three main streams of thought, Tractarianism (later transmuted into Anglo-Catholicism), "Broad" churchmanship, and Evangelicalism.

### 2 THE TRACTARIAN MOVEMENT AND ANGLO-CATHOLICISM

As an under-graduate at Oxford from 1834 to 1837, Ryle could not fail to be confronted with the claims of the "Tractarians". This party, strongly influenced by continental romanticism, is usually reckoned to have its informal beginnings in Keble's famous "Assize" sermon in 1833.<sup>(1)</sup> This public "assertion of the spiritual independence of the Church"<sup>(2)</sup> was a scathing attack on what Keble saw as the Erastianism of the Church of England, and was the first rallying-point of the "Catholic" Party. Its cardinal beliefs were those of "Apostolic Succession" and "Baptismal Regeneration", and it hoped to bring the Established Church back to what it considered the pristine purity of the primitive Catholic Church, although its opponents saw it as a regression to medievalism. The leaders of the party were unquestionably devout, and they possessed "some intangible quality, some dynamic of the

human spirit which can only be termed vision”.(3) In spite of the fact that the “Oxford Movement” represented only a minority in the church, and, as it embraced “Romish” ritual, was condemned both by the bishops and the civil courts, it eventually exercised a powerful influence in the church, to the extent that David Samuel goes so far as to say that today the Church of England is “a church tinged with the ritual of Catholicism and (with) a clergy and laity who can hardly conceive that the Church was ever uniformly protestant”.(4) From the time of his evangelical conversion Ryle was totally opposed to Anglo-Catholicism, and one of his first recorded impressions as a young Christian was of “the enormous folly of the whole doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration”.(5) Throughout his long ministry he devoted himself to the refutation of the Anglo-Catholic position. He viewed the Oxford Movement as totally subversive of all that the Church of England stood for, and in his last public address he exhorted his flock: “never forget that the principles of the Protestant Reformation made this country what she is, and let nothing ever tempt you to forsake them.”(6)

### **3 THE EVANGELICALS**

Contemporary with Ryle’s exposure to, and rejection of, Tractarianism was his positive response to the message of Evangelicalism. The evangelicals traced their spiritual descent to the Reformers, but in a more immediate sense were the heirs to the Eighteenth Century Revival. Charles Simeon at Cambridge, and John Hill at Oxford had done sterling work in maintaining Evangelical principles at the universities, and the movement was growing in numbers and respectability.(7) Throughout Ryle’s life the Evangelicals were a force to be

reckoned with in the Church. John Ryle never diverged from his loyalty to the Evangelical Party, and many of his written works are defences of the position that he had embraced as a young man. However the Evangelicals had their faults, and Ryle was faithful in exposing them, while at the same time prescribing appropriate remedies. However, the Evangelicals, generally, during the latter part of the nineteenth century failed to meet the intellectual challenge of the Liberal and Catholic Parties<sup>(8)</sup>, and although well represented numerically, by the end of the century their influence had sadly declined.

#### 4 “BROAD” CHURCHMANSHIP AND THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM

S.C. Carpenter, in his balanced and discerning work *“Church and People”* has two illuminating chapters entitled “The Movement of Thought”. After a few paragraphs on religion and science in the early nineteenth century, he introduces the short pregnant sentence: “Then came Darwin”.<sup>(10)</sup> And, in a way, that says it all. For the *“Origin of Species”* was a watershed in philosophical thought in the Victorian era. Followed as it was by *“Essays and Reviews”* barely a year later in 1860, the double impact of a scientific treatise that threw into question the biblical account of Creation, and a collection of articles all to a lesser or greater extent critical of traditional Christian beliefs, brought into being, *ipso facto*, the ecclesiastical party henceforth known as “Liberal”. Swept forward on the tide of nineteenth century rationalism, the “Liberals” became increasingly a force to be reckoned with in the Church. Ryle opposed them bitterly, seeing in the movement an enemy of the evangelical cause as dangerous as Ritualism. Over

and over again in his Episcopal charges he adverts to the destructive influence of the “neologians” and freethinkers, carrying on their work within the church. His instinct in opposing the movement commends itself to one’s conscience, but his defence of the faith, though sturdy, suffered from the characteristic defect of nineteenth century evangelicalism in that it lacked intellectual depth, although Ryle himself had a fine mind, and was certainly well-read.

## **5 NON-CONFORMITY AND ROMAN CATHOLICISM**

These, then, were the main ecclesiastical currents in the ocean of the Victorian Church of England. We have outlined Ryle’s response to them, but we must also remember that the Victorian era was one in which the Non-conformists came into their own, and when the last remaining disabilities of Roman Catholics were removed; and this review of the ecclesiastical situation in Ryle’s day would not be complete without taking into consideration the effect of events in the Non-conformist and Roman Catholic communions.

### **5.1 The Nonconformists**

Although the Toleration Act of 1689 had removed the most severe restrictions on Dissenters, they had to wait until 1828 for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts which, technically, had prevented them from holding office, and it was not until 1871, when the University Tests Abolition Act was passed, that the last of their legal disabilities was removed. E.J. Poole-Connor gives this description of the progress of the Non-conformists: “Its churches were numerous, its members intelligent and devout, the preachers men of gift and grace.”<sup>(11)</sup> There is no doubt that Ryle greatly respected many of the

Dissenters - he had himself drunk deeply at the fountains of the Puritans - and he alluded to the Act of Uniformity of 1662 as an example of the “suicidal blindness of the church under the Stuarts.”<sup>(12)</sup> Generally, he has little to say of “Church” and “Chapel” relations, and regarded any form of union between them as an impractical dream.<sup>(13)</sup>

## 5.2 The Roman Catholics

The situation *apropos* Rome was “another kettle of fish.” Although all the leading Evangelicals had supported the Roman Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, as a matter of simple justice, yet they were always aware of Romish aims, and opposed them resolutely. Bishop Ryle was no exception, and the main reason for his fight against Anglo-Catholicism was that he saw it leading inevitably to re-union with Rome. One of the basic threads in the tapestry of his written works is his refutation of Roman Catholic teaching, his warning against their ambitions, and his scathing denunciation of their cruel persecution of protestants.<sup>(14)</sup> This then, is the background against which we must examine John Ryle’s theology. To that task we now turn.



## Part 1: The Doctrine of Scripture

### Chapter 3

## THE THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

### 1 INTRODUCTION

In his fascinating work, *“The Interpretation of the New Testament”*<sup>(1)</sup>, Stephen Neill observes that the publication of *“Essays and Reviews”* in 1860 marked a watershed in the English church’s understanding of the Bible. Prior to that time “almost all good Christians in England were what would now be called ‘fundamentalists’...all accorded the Bible an unqualified reverence, and all believed that, if its inerrancy were successfully impugned, the whole Christian faith would collapse”<sup>(2)</sup>.

### 2 THE RISE OF BIBLICAL CRITICISM

*“Essays and Reviews”* changed all that. From 1860, as Neill puts it: “..the tide could not be turned back. It was quite certain that criticism had come to stay, and that henceforward the Bible would be treated like any other book.”<sup>(3)</sup> No holds would be barred. The Scriptures would be subjected to ruthless investigation. Unless they were able on their own merits to stand up to the challenge, the cause might be held to be lost in advance”<sup>(4)</sup>

Although Neill’s further statement that “in the years that followed 1860, Christians in England were almost in a state of panic”<sup>(5)</sup> is certainly too much of a generalisation, and probably exaggerated, there can be no doubt that the new views about the Bible had made a significant impact. What then were these views, and whence came they? Following the rise of the ‘Enlightenment’

in Europe, one of the most influential philosophers was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), and his theory of 'progress by antagonism to higher unity' has fascinated many minds in many fields of knowledge - the natural sciences, sociology, and political science. His impact was no less great in the religious world, and nowhere more than in the "Tubingen" school, and in particular the work of the celebrated New Testament critic F.C.Baur, whose thesis of the development of the New Testament challenged the authenticity of many of the New Testament books, relegating some of the most significant of them to the second century. Another devotee of Hegel's, G.F.Strauss had written his highly destructive 'Life of Jesus', and sundry other German writers had been making merry with traditional views of the Old Testament. Despite the traditional parochialism of English thought, these radical ideas had finally permeated English intellectual circles, and the result was, among other manifestations, the notorious "*Essays and Reviews*".

### **3 THE TRACTARIANS AND AUTHORITY**

Inspiration, of course, has implications for authority, and Ryle was engaged in a continuing battle for this aspect of the evangelical faith as a result. But the authority of Scripture was also being assailed on another front. The Oxford Movement or 'Tractarians', engaged as they were in an ever accelerating move towards Rome, were undermining the authority of the written Word by their appeal to the voice of the Church. This tendency found classical expression in Newman's "*The Development of Christian Doctrine*", which, although published after its author had been received into the church of Rome, was actually written before that final step was taken.<sup>(6)</sup> Hook's famous (or

infamous, according to one's ecclesiastical sympathies) sermon, *'Hear the Church'*, preached at the Chapel Royal in 1838<sup>(7)</sup>, although actually on the subject of Apostolic Succession, passed into proverbial usage as the epitome of the "Ritualist" view of the fount of authority for Christian belief.<sup>(8)</sup>

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

Inspiration and Authority - these were the twin issues Ryle tackled in his writings on Scripture, and to his treatment of them we now turn.

## Part 1: The Doctrine of Scripture

### Chapters 4 - 6: THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

#### Chapter 4

### THE ESSENCE AND EXTENT OF INSPIRATION

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

The works of Bishop Ryle abound with references to, and expositions of the doctrines of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. He adverts to the former in specific papers devoted to the subject, for example, the first paper in his book *'Old Paths'*, and at strategic points in his assaults on rationalistic tendencies in the church, *vide* his "Pharisees and Sadducees"<sup>(1)</sup>, in his book *'Knots Untied'* and his discussion of John 10:35 in his *'Expository Thoughts on the Gospels'*<sup>(2)</sup>. For Ryle the Inspiration of Scripture is "the very keel and foundation of Christianity"<sup>(3)</sup> and he saw it as particularly important in his own day, because of the increasing secularisation of English society. That is, of course, an anachronistic phrase, but as we study the bishop's own words, we find that this is indeed the issue before him.

"The subject is one of peculiar importance in the present day. Infidelity and scepticism abound everywhere. In one form or another they are to be found in every rank and class of society. Thousands of Englishmen are not ashamed to say that they regard the Bible as an old, obsolete Jewish book, which has no special claim on our

faith and obedience, and that it contains many inaccuracies and defects”(4)

Hear him again in an address given at the opening of the eighth Liverpool Diocesan Conference in 1889. In issuing a serious warning to his people about “the increasing laxity of opinion both about doctrine and practice among all professing Christians” (5), he finds it necessary to warn *clergy* to stand fast in the faith, thus:

“Stand fast in the old belief that the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation was given by inspiration of God, and that the historical facts recorded in the Old Testament are all credible and true. Do not be shaken by the vague assertions and big swelling words of those who sneer at everything supernatural, and talk about “the laws of nature, the discoveries of science, and the results of modern criticism.”(6)

We have adduced sufficient evidence to prove the importance of Inspiration to the evangelical bishop. We turn to consider his view of the doctrine in detail.

## **2 THE ESSENCE OF INSPIRATION**

On the issue of what for Ryle is the essence of inspiration, we cannot do better than let the good bishop speak for himself. Near the beginning of his paper on Inspiration he says:

“In the first place, I mean to assert that the Bible is utterly unlike all other books that were ever written, because its writers were specially inspired, or enabled by God, for the work which they did. I

say that the Book comes to us with a claim which no other book possesses. It is stamped with Divine authority. In this respect it stands entirely alone. Sermons, and tracts, and theological writings of all kinds, may be sound and edifying, but they are only the handiwork of uninspired man. The Bible alone is the Book of God.”(7)

Ryle’s phrase, “the Bible is utterly unlike all other books” is not accidental, for he uses the same expression in his briefer treatment of Inspiration in “*Practical Religion*”(8) and in “*Knots Untied*”, on the same subject, says of the Bible: “there is an entire gulf between the Word of God and any other book in the world.”(9) As we have pointed out in the previous chapter, Jowett’s seminal dictum “interpret the Scripture like any other book” had caused a veritable *furor*, and it is evident that it is this apparent heterodoxy that Ryle rejected in very pointed language. For Ryle, then, the expression “Book of God” sums up his understanding of Inspiration. The Bible is a book written by God’s enabling, stamped with His authority; this is its Inspiration. Ryle does not pretend that defining Inspiration is an easy, or even an entirely possible task. He faces the difficulty squarely, if somewhat inadequately, in his triennial charge to the Diocese of Liverpool, an address given in 1890, which one would assume gives his maturest thought on the matter. We quote him at length:

“...the church has never defined exactly what *inspiration* means, and consequently many of the best Christians are not entirely of one mind. I am one of those who believe that the writers of the Bible

were supernaturally and divinely enabled by God, as no other men ever have been, for the work which they did, and that, consequently, the book they produced is unlike any other book in existence, and stands entirely alone. Inspiration, in short, is a miracle. We must not confound it with intellectual power, such as great poets and authors possess. To talk of Shakespeare and Milton and Byron being *inspired*, like Moses and St Paul, is to my mind almost profane. Nor must we confound it with the gifts and graces bestowed on the early Christians in the primitive Church. All the apostles were enabled to preach and work miracles, but not all were inspired to write. We must rather regard it as a special supernatural gift, bestowed on about thirty people out of mankind, in order to qualify them for the special business of writing the Scriptures; and we must be content to allow that, like everything miraculous, we cannot entirely explain it, though we can believe it.”<sup>(10)</sup>

This is perhaps as close as we shall come to a definition of Inspiration from Ryle, and although we may complain that it is jejune and simplistic compared with the detailed expositions of recent evangelical writers, notably the compilers of the Declaration of the International Council for Biblical Inerrancy, it is a good example of Ryle’s concern for clarity of expression and the avoidance of unhelpful detail when addressing “the plain man”.

However, we must avoid jumping to the conclusion that the bishop, in his insistence on the miraculous nature of Inspiration, espouses a “mechanical” view of this miracle. On the contrary, he rejects the “dictation” theory

entirely. As he says in the paper just quoted:

“I do not admit for a moment that they (the writers of Scripture) were mere machines holding pens, and, like type-setters in a printing-office, did not understand what they were doing. I abhor the “mechanical” theory of inspiration. I dislike the idea that men like Moses and St Paul were no better than organ-pipes, employed by the Holy Ghost, or ignorant secretaries or amanuenses, who wrote by dictation what they did not understand.”<sup>(11)</sup>

### **3 THE EXTENT OF INSPIRATION**

As might be expected, Ryle espouses the position of belief in plenary, verbal inspiration, although he recognizes that not all Christians hold to this position. He says: “Concerning the precise extent to which the Bible is inspired, I freely admit that Christians differ widely.”<sup>(13)</sup>

#### **3.1 Defining the Extent of Inspiration**

In characteristic fashion he affirms his own position quite unequivocally:

“The view which I maintain is that every book, and chapter and verse, and syllable of the Bible was originally given by inspiration of God. I hold that not only the substance of the Bible, but its language,-not only the ideas of the Bible, but its words,-not only certain parts of the Bible, but every chapter of the book,- that all and each are of Divine authority. I hold that the Scripture not only *contains* the Word of God, but *is* the Word of God.”<sup>(14)</sup>



In a footnote, he quotes Bishop Christopher Wordsworth (1807-1885), with approval:

“We affirm that the Bible is the Word of God, and that it is not marred with human infirmities. We do not imagine, with some, that the Bible is like a threshing floor, on which the wheat and the chaff lie mingled together, and that it is left to the reader to winnow and sift the wheat from the chaff by the fan and sieve of his own mind”(15)

At the same time, Ryle makes it clear that he is not contending for the inspiration of a translation, but for the inspiration of the Word in the original.

He explains:

“The inspiration of every word, for which I contend, is the inspiration of every original Hebrew and Greek word, as the Bible writers first wrote it down. I stand up for nothing more and nothing less than this. I lay no claim to the inspiration of every word in the various versions and translations of God’s Word. So far as those translations and versions are faithfully and correctly done, so far they are of equal authority with the original Hebrew and Greek.”(16)

Far from seeing this as a serious concession, the bishop is swift to add, confidently, that the English Bible (the King James version), although not perfect, “is so far correct, that in reading it we have a right to believe that we are reading in our own tongue not the word of man, but of God.”(17)

## 3.2 Defending Plenary, Verbal Inspiration

The question may be asked, “Is such an uncompromising view of the extent of inspiration necessary?” Ryle was well aware that many of his fellow-Christians “bitterly opposed”<sup>(18)</sup> such a position. He for his part averred that it was for him, “the only safe and tenable view which can be adopted, and the only one which is free from innumerable objections.”<sup>(19)</sup> After calling respectable witnesses, both past and contemporary, who were of the same opinion as himself, and allowing that as “men’s minds are variously constituted.... ..arguments and reasons which appear weighty to some are of no weight with others”<sup>(20)</sup>, our evangelical leader sets forth his arguments for holding to plenary inspiration. He uses six basic lines of argument, and it is interesting to note that, as one would expect from Ryle, four of them are clearly *practical*, and only two are *directly theological*.

### 3.2.1 Defences of a Strictly Theological Nature

We take up the strictly theological arguments first, stated in Ryle’s own words:

“...if the Bible is not fully inspired and contains imperfections, I cannot understand *the language which is frequently used about it* in its own pages. Such expressions as “The oracles of God” - “He saith” - “God saith” - “the Holy Ghost spake by Esaias the prophet” - “the Holy Ghost saith”... would appear to me inexplicable and extravagant if applied to a book containing occasional blemishes, defects, and mistakes.....Once grant that every word of Scripture is inspired, and I see an admirable propriety in the

language. I cannot understand “the Holy Ghost” making a mistake, or an “oracle” containing anything defective! If any man replies that the Holy Ghost did not *always* speak by Isaiah, I will ask him who is to decide when He did and when He did not? I see much in this.”(21)

It is clear that Ryle is here taking the theological position that plenary inspiration is the standpoint of Scripture itself, an argument that is at the heart of present defences of the inerrancy of Scripture.(22)

The bishop’s second theological argument is as follows:

“For another thing, the theory that the Bible was not given by inspiration of God, appears to me utterly *at variance with several quotations from the Old Testament* which I find in the New. I allude to those quotations in which the whole force of the passage turns on one single word, and once even on the use of the singular instead of the plural number. Take, for instance, such quotations as “The Lord said unto my Lord” (Matt.xxii.44) - “I said, Ye are gods” (John x.34.) - “To Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” (Gal.iii.16.) - “He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare Thy name unto my brethren.” (Heb.ii.11 - 12.) - In every one of these cases the whole point lies in a single word. But if this is so, it is hard to see on what principle we can deny the inspiration of all the words of Scripture. At any rate, those who deny verbal inspiration will find it difficult to show us

which words are inspired and which are not. Who is to draw the line, and where is it to be drawn? I see much in this.”<sup>(23)</sup>

Again we see that Ryle is employing an argument that is still being used today<sup>(24)</sup>, and that appeals to the Scripture’s own statements about itself. Of course, these arguments have little appeal for those who deny the reality of Special Revelation, but the bishop is addressing fellow-Christians who accepted the authority of Scripture while denying plenary verbal inspiration, and for such the arguments are still of considerable weight. Currently, for example, Paul D Feinberg has demonstrated that anti-inerrantists have not answered the *prima facie* case for verbal inspiration found in John 10:34 and Galatians 3:16.<sup>(25)</sup>

### 3.2.2 Defences of a Practical Nature

As we have indicated, Ryle’s other arguments for inerrancy are of a practical nature, and can be summarised as follows:

- (1) If the Bible is not fully inspired it cannot be “a perfect rule of faith and practice.”<sup>(26)</sup>
- (2) A Bible not fully inspired loses much of its value “as a weapon in controversy.”<sup>(27)</sup>
- (3) “To give up verbal inspiration appears...*to destroy the usefulness of the Bible as an instrument of public preaching and instruction.*”<sup>(28)</sup>
- (4) Denial of verbal inspiration destroys “*a great part of the usefulness of the Bible as a source of comfort and instruction in private reading*”<sup>(29)</sup>

These arguments are obvious; the constant rejoinder in respect of each one is that confidence is lost if some part of Scripture may not in fact be relied upon. The significance of the arguments is that they disclose the deep pastoral and evangelistic concern that is never far from the surface in all Ryle's writings. He is concerned for the spread of the gospel and the edification, exhortation and comfort of the saints. The loss of an inerrant Bible places these spiritual essentials in jeopardy, so this threatened loss must be resisted at all costs.

### **3.3 Rebuttal of Objections to Plenary, Verbal Inspiration**

#### **3.3.1 General Considerations**

Nevertheless, a hearing must be given to the objections to verbal inspiration, even if only to refute them. The bishop is not always at his most convincing when he is answering objections, but he must be given credit for not dodging the issues, and endeavouring to give honest answers. To begin with, we need to note Ryle's basic attitude to the question of the difficulties of the "verbal inspiration" position. He acknowledges the difficulties that in his time still awaited resolution - the reference to "Jeremy the Prophet" in Matthew 27, or the hour of the crucifixion in Mark's and John's accounts, for example. But concerning them he says: "I have no doubt *these difficulties can be explained*, and perhaps will be some day."<sup>(30)</sup> However, the matter does not rest there. Might not such an attitude be regarded as obscurantist? The bishop thinks not! For him, the concept of verbal inspiration is a "great principle in theology"<sup>(31)</sup> and as such is not to be given up because of difficulties. The reason is three-fold, and we will summarise his arguments, and then establish them by reference to his own words.

**First**, the very nature of the subject makes for difficulties. As he puts it: “I expect difficulties in such a deep and miraculous matter as inspiration, which I have not eyes to see through.”<sup>(32)</sup>

**Second**, the difficulties may be of a temporary nature. To quote him on this: “Never give up a great principle in theology on account of difficulties. Wait patiently, and the difficulties may all melt away. Let that be an axiom in your mind.”<sup>(33)</sup>. Then follows an apposite illustration from astronomy - the apparent aberrations of the planet Uranus which had puzzled astronomers even to the point of possibly disproving the Newtonian system. The French astronomer Leverrier resisted such ideas, convinced that such a great principle as that of Newtonian astronomy should not be given up because of difficulties - patience would provide the answers. His view was vindicated in the discovery of the planet Neptune! We must similarly maintain our view of inspiration, confident that in time our confidence will be vindicated.

**Third**, ours is not the only theory that faces difficulties! As Ryle puts it: “In the meantime we may rest assured that the difficulties which beset any other theory of inspiration are tenfold greater than any which beset our own.” <sup>(34)</sup>

### **3.3.2 Specific Objections**

Moving on to the specific problems that were raised as fatal to the theory of verbal inspiration, let us look at Ryle’s attempted refutation in detail. The alleged difficulties fall into two categories - contradiction with facts extrinsic to Scripture, and anomalies within Scripture that militate against the concept of verbal inspiration.

The first category includes conflict between the Bible and the facts of history and natural science. Regarding the former, the bishop makes the point that it is unfair to decide *a priori* against the Bible, which has a claim to be regarded as a reliable source.<sup>(35)</sup> Here he anticipates more recent apologetics which have established that often the Scriptures provide a more accurate picture than other contemporary sources.<sup>(36)</sup> As to the latter, Ryle denies the assertion, and while acknowledging that the Bible “was not written to teach a system of geology, botany, or astronomy, or a history of birds, insects and animals”<sup>(37)</sup>, nevertheless its use of the language of phenomena is wisely adapted to the understanding of ordinary people.<sup>(38)</sup> This matter of popular intelligibility is important to Ryle, and in a footnote he quotes an apparently contemporary scientist, Whewell, to this effect.<sup>(39)</sup> Today, it is commonplace in conservative evangelical apologetics to find inerrancy taught with this qualifying rider.<sup>(40)</sup>

As far as internal anomalies are concerned, the bishop first deals with the critics’ rejection of the major Old Testament miracles and primeval history. His rebuttal has two main thrusts, *viz.*, the confirmation of the historicity of these events by the New Testament writers<sup>(41)</sup>, and then the inconsistency of accepting some miracles, particularly the resurrection of Christ, and rejecting others.<sup>(42)</sup> A later work of Ryle’s takes cognizance of the “kenosis” theory to explain Christ’s acceptance of the Old Testament’s authenticity, and without going into the theological subtleties of the argument he comments:

“When I read that our Lord Jesus Christ is “One with the Father”, that “In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”, that He is “the Light of the world”, my mind cannot conceive the

possibility of His being ignorant, as latter-day theories about Genesis certainly imply, however fully I admit the 'Kenosis' of His Incarnation. The blessed Saviour to whom I am taught to commit my soul, in the very week that He died for my redemption, spoke of the Flood and the days of Noah as realities! If He spoke *ignorantly*, with Calvary in full view, it would shake to the foundation my confidence in His power to save me, and would destroy my peace. I abhor the idea of an ignorant Saviour!"<sup>(43)</sup>

Another objection to verbal inspiration is the charge that the discrepancies in the differing accounts of events in the gospels cannot be harmonised.<sup>(44)</sup> To this Ryle replies, with his usual "common sense" approach, as follows:

"I answer that the number of these discrepancies is grossly exaggerated, and that in many cases they are only apparent, and disappear under the touch of common sense. Even in the hardest of them we should remember, in common fairness, that circumstances are very likely kept back from us which entirely reconcile everything, if we only knew them. Very often in these days when two honest, veracious men give a separate account of some long story, their accounts do not quite tally, because one dwells on one part and the other on another."<sup>(45)</sup>

Ryle himself, in his "*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*" engages in some harmonising, and quotes previous writers' attempts to explain apparent discrepancies.<sup>(46)</sup>



The other arguments with which the bishop deals, generally quite adequately, relate to matters which have been answered by many able writers before and since, and the only matter for surprise is that these arguments are such hardy perennials - one might be forgiven for thinking that some critics simply never read the responses that their criticisms evoke!<sup>(47)</sup>

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

So much then for Ryle's exposition of the essence and extent of the inspiration of Scripture. We consider next his understanding of the evidence of inspiration.

## Part 1 The Doctrine of Scripture

### Chapters 4-6 THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

## Chapter 5

# THE EVIDENCES OF INSPIRATION

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The “Evidences” of the Inspiration of Scripture is a subject to which the bishop devoted considerable space, and while the strengths and weaknesses of his position will be apparent in his exposition, we will reserve evaluation to a separate chapter, in which we will also review critically his views, already expounded, on the essence and extent of Inspiration.

It is important to take note of the parameters of Ryle’s presentation of the “evidences”. He has no intention of looking into questions of authorship and authenticity; as he puts it: “I shall not waste time. . . on what are commonly called external evidences. I shall bring forward the book itself, and put it in the witness box.”<sup>(1)</sup> His aim is to show “that the Bible itself, fairly examined, is the best witness to its own inspiration”<sup>(2)</sup> To this end, he seeks to marshal certain facts, satisfied that “these facts ought to satisfy every reasonable inquirer that the Bible is of God, and not of man”.<sup>(3)</sup> What then, are these facts?

## 2 PRESENTATION OF THE EVIDENCES

### 2.1 The Evidence from the “Depth” of Scripture

Ryle begins by saying: “It is a fact, that there is an *extraordinary fulness and richness in the contents of the Bible.*” He delineates five areas in which he

sees the Bible as uniquely setting forth truth otherwise unknown, or in contrast with prevailing error. These include cosmic origin and destiny, the unflattering portrait of man as a corrupt sinner, a true picture of God, of salvation, and a credible explanation for the world's perennial tragedy, *viz.*, its fallenness. In the light of this, Ryle asserts: "It is a simple broad fact, that in the matter of contents, the Bible stands entirely alone, and no other book is fit to be named in the same day with it."<sup>(5)</sup>

## **2.2 The Evidence from the Unity of Scripture**

We note Ryle's opening comment: "It is another fact that there is an extraordinary unity and harmony in the contents of the Bible, which is entirely above man".<sup>(6)</sup> Very cogently, the "dean" of the Evangelical Party develops this line of argument thus:

"Here is a long book written by not less than thirty different persons. The writers were men of every rank and class in society. One was a lawgiver. One was a warlike king. One was a peaceful king. One was a herdsman. One had been brought up as a publican, -another as a physician, - another as a learned Pharisee, two as fishermen, - several as priests. They lived at different intervals over a space of 1500 years; and the greater part of them never saw each other face to face. And yet there is a perfect harmony among all these writers? They all write as if they were under one dictation. The style and handwriting may vary, but the mind that runs through their work is always one and the same. They all tell the same story. They all give one account of man, - one account of God, - one

account of the way of salvation, - one account of the human heart. You see truth unfolding under their hands, as you go through the volume of their writings, - but you never detect any real contradiction, or contrariety of view. Let us set down this fact in our minds, and ponder it well. Tell us not that this unity might be the result of chance. No one can ever believe that but a very credulous person. There is only one satisfactory account to be given of the fact before us. - The Bible is not of man, but of God.’’(7)

Surely this vivid presentation needs no clarifying commentary!

### **2.3 The Evidence from the Sublimity of Scripture**

Ryle argues that “there is an extraordinary wisdom, sublimity and majesty in the style of the Bible, which is above man.”(8) We ask indulgence for another lengthy quotation, as this is necessary to pick up the flavour of Ryle’s argument, which he develops as follows:

“Strange and unlikely as it was, the writers of Scripture have produced a book which even at this day is utterly unrivalled. With all our boasted attainments in science and art and learning, we can produce nothing that can be compared with the Bible....There is a strain and a style and a tone of thought about it, which separate it from all other writings. There are no weak points, and motes, and flaws and blemishes. There is no mixture of infirmity and feebleness, such as you will find in the works of even the best Christians....To talk of comparing the Bible with other “sacred books” so-called, such as the Koran, the Shasters (sic), or the Book

of Mormon is positively absurd....God seems to have allowed the existence of these pretended revelations, in order to prove the immeasurable superiority of His own Word...Every honest and unprejudiced reader must see that there is a gulf between the Bible and any other book, which no man may fathom...How can this mighty difference be accounted for? The men who wrote the Bible had no special advantages. They lived in a remote corner of the civilized earth. They had, most of them, little leisure, few books, and no learning, - such as learning is reckoned in this world. Yet the book they compose is one which is unrivalled! There is but one way of accounting for this fact - They wrote under the direct inspiration of God.”<sup>(9)</sup>

#### **2.4 The Evidence from the Accuracy of the Bible**

To quote our “Evangelical Champion” again, “..there is an extraordinary accuracy in the facts and statements of the Bible which is above man.”<sup>(10)</sup> The bishop adverts to the changes, discoveries and improvements of the intervening centuries; he points to the way that almost all human institutions have been sifted and amended, yet all without the discovery of corresponding defects in the Bible.<sup>(11)</sup> To quote him at length yet again:

“But all this time men have never discovered a weak point or a defect in the Bible. Infidels have assailed it in vain. There it stands, - perfect, and fresh, and complete, as it did eighteen centuries ago. The march of intellect never overtakes it. The wisdom of wise men never gets beyond it. The science of philosophers never proves it

wrong. The discoveries of travellers never convict it of mistakes.... How shall we account for this fact? Who could have thought it possible that so large a book, handling such a variety of subjects, should at the end of 1800 years, be found so free from erroneous statements? There is only one account to be given of the fact. - The Bible was written by inspiration of God.”<sup>(12)</sup>

Once more, Ryle’s eloquence speaks for itself!

## **2.5 The Evidence from Spiritual Suitability**

As Ryle puts it “It is another fact that there is in the Bible an extraordinary suitability to the spiritual wants of all mankind.”<sup>(13)</sup> This suitability Ryle finds in its abiding relevance, its universal appeal whether to different social strata or different cultures, or to differing intellectual capacities.<sup>(14)</sup> He also discovers it in the Bible’s constant freshness. As he expresses it:

“It is the only book, moreover, which seems always fresh and evergreen and new. For eighteen centuries it has been studied and prayed over by millions of private Christians, and expounded and explained and preached to us by thousands of ministers. Fathers, and Schoolmen, and Reformers, and Puritans, and modern Divines, have incessantly dug down into the mine of Scripture, and yet have never exhausted it. It is a well never dry, and a field which is never barren....It is the one book which suits the world. ...Now how shall we account for this singular fact? What satisfactory explanation can we give? There is only one account and explanation.- The Bible was written by Divine inspiration. It is the book of the world, because

He inspired it who formed the world, - who made all nations of one blood, - and knows man's common nature. It is the book for every heart, because He dictated it who alone knows all hearts, and what all hearts require. It is the book of God.<sup>(15)</sup>

## **2.6 The Evidence from the Effects of the Bible on Nations**

Last of all, Ryle puts forward the argument that “the Bible has had a most extraordinary effect on the condition of those nations in which it has been known, taught and read.”<sup>(16)</sup> He asks us to compare protestant countries, where the Bible has exercised a great influence, with Roman Catholic countries which have not had the benefit of that influence. He asks that they be compared in terms of their commitment to liberty or tyranny, in terms of the love of truth or bondage to superstition, in knowledge or ignorance, in public and private morality or corruption, and sums up thus: “Yes! when you know how a nation deals with the Bible, you may generally know what a nation is.”<sup>(17)</sup>

## **3 SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCES**

The bishop then summarises the arguments and their significance in a way that speaks for itself, and is therefore quoted at length:

“I place these six facts about the Bible before my readers, and I ask them to consider them well. Take them all six together, treat them fairly, and look at them honestly. Upon any other principle than that of divine inspiration, those facts appear to me inexplicable and unaccountable. Here is a book written by a succession of Jews, in a

little corner of the world, which positively stands alone. Not only were its writers isolated and cut off in a peculiar manner from other nations, but they belonged to a people who have never produced any other book of note except the Bible! There is not the slightest proof that, unassisted and left to themselves, they were capable of writing anything remarkable, like the Greeks and Romans. Yet these men have given the world a volume which for depth, unity, sublimity, accuracy, suitableness to the wants of man, and power of influencing its readers, is perfectly unrivalled. How can this be explained? How can it be accounted for? To my mind there is only one answer. The writers of the Bible were divinely helped and qualified for the work which they did. The book which they have given us was written by inspiration of God.”<sup>(18)</sup>

#### **4 A CALL FOR A MORE MILITANT APPROACH**

Bishop Ryle concludes his case for the evidences of inspiration with a strong suggestion that in opposing infidelity, “Christians are too apt to stand only on the defensive.”<sup>(19)</sup> He suggests that a more aggressive approach might be more profitable. He believes that evangelicals ought to “press home on the adversaries of inspiration the enormous difficulties of their own position. We have a right to ask them how they can possibly explain the origin and nature of the Bible, if they will not allow that it is of Divine authority?...To tell us that man’s unassisted mind could have written the Bible is simply ridiculous. It is worse than ridiculous: it is the height of credulity. In short, the difficulties of unbelief are far greater than the difficulties of faith.”<sup>(20)</sup>



## 5 CONCLUSION

We have now reviewed Ryle's view of the inspiration of Scripture; in particular, his understanding of the essence and extent of inspiration, and his presentation of the evidence for it. We will now proceed to an evaluation of his position.

## Part 1 The Doctrine of Scripture

### Chapters 4-6 THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

## Chapter 6

### AN EVALUATION

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

Any evaluation of Ryle's views on the Inspiration of Scripture must, to be fair, take serious account of the historical context. His was not the time of Linguistic Analysis, of Form Criticism, or Source Criticism, or Redaction Criticism. Nor did he write as one consciously ignoring or opposing Presuppositional Apologetics. The Literary Criticism of the Bible was still, if not in its infancy, anything but a fully-developed discipline. In a word, we must not be anachronistic in our assessment; rather we need to ask what kind of contribution he made to the religious and theological thinking of his day.

Even after making that necessary adjustment, it is needful to avoid another trap: that of thinking of religious and theological thought as the preserve of the university or the seminary. It is all too easy to forget that vast numbers of Christians who have not received "professional" training in theology think often and deeply about religious and theological issues. This becomes crucial to a fair assessment of Ryle's theology, particularly as he confessedly had "the common man" in view.

## **2 POSITIVE ELEMENTS IN RYLE ON INSPIRATION**

To begin with, let us point out what are to us the positively valuable aspects of Ryle's theology of Inspiration.

### **2.1 His Recognition of the Importance of the Issue.**

Firstly, we commend him for facing up to the importance of the issue. He was not content to expound his faith making the unwarranted assumption that his contemporaries all shared his presuppositions about a uniquely revealed religion. Nor did he take a "fideistic" view that ignored the importance of evidence. He realized that Christianity was up against a most serious assault not only from outside the church, but from within its own ranks,<sup>(1)</sup> an assault that made much use of attacks on the authority of Scripture. Bishop Ryle was not the kind of man who would ignore such a challenge.

### **2.2 His Refusal to Make Hasty Concessions to the Unproven**

Secondly, we admire his refusal to be panicked by the claims of the critics. It is true that he does not seem to have answered the "Higher Critics" adequately in his most extensive attempted rebuttal of their position,<sup>(2)</sup> and we will take issue with him on this in due course, but even allowing that, it is evident that he saw no reason to abandon his position merely because of the vociferous "neologians". He shrewdly noted their extensive disagreement among themselves - "those who ask us to believe their theories are often divided among themselves"<sup>(3)</sup>. In keeping with this personal stability he advises his clergy at some length in words that deserve consideration. To quote him:

"I can only advise all my clergy, who want counsel on the subject

of Higher Criticism, to cultivate a very cautious attitude of judgment. Beware of taking up loose and confused views of the doctrine of inspiration...Do not be carried off your feet by the first clever book you come across, and especially if you have never examined this branch of study before. Do not mistake assertions for proofs, suggestions for solid arguments, and hypothetical conjectures for logical conclusions. There are two sides to most questions; mind you look at both. Never give up great principles on account of petty, flashy objections, which at first sight look unanswerable, but soon melt like snow.’’(4)

### **2.3 His Wisdom in Arguing from a Safe and Tested Position**

Again, one can only commend the bishop for keeping to ground where he could make the best use of his undoubted polemical powers, *viz.* in the forceful presentation of broad principles of proven worth; after all, whatever problems certain phenomena of scripture might present, the theology of Scripture, that is, Scripture’s testimony about itself, is clear enough, and the observable facts as to the unity, sublimity and influence of Scripture and so on have a cumulative force that compels attention, and, even if not finally allowed, demand an answer.

### **2.4 His Straightforwardness**

A further observation may be made about the straightforwardness of Ryle’s presentation. In one of his most trenchant papers, “Pharisees and Sadducees”(5), Ryle, in warning the Lord’s people of “the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Matt.16:6), deals with what he calls “the

insidiousness of false doctrine”.<sup>(6)</sup> Hear him as he inveighs against the attacks from the rationalistic school in the church:

“I consider the most dangerous champion of the Sadducee school is not the man who tells you openly that he wants you to lay aside any part of the truth, and to become a free-thinker and a sceptic. It is the man who begins with quietly insinuating doubts as to the position that we ought to take up about religion,....It is the man who is ever reminding us that we ought to take care how we think lightly of men of powerful minds, and great intellects...who do not think as we do...It is the man who is ever harping on the difficulties of inspiration.. It is the man who crowns this kind of talk by a few calm sneers against what he is pleased to call “old-fashioned views” and “narrow-minded theology,” and “bigotry”...in the present day. But when men begin to speak to us in this kind of way, then is the time to stand upon our guard. Then is the time...‘to take heed and beware of leaven.’ ”.<sup>(7)</sup>

The very strong tone of the bishop’s words discloses his abhorrence of anything that smacked of subtlety and scheming, and he therefore always went out of his way to make sure that he could not be misunderstood. It must of course be admitted that his was not a temperament that set well to relativizing, whether in church history or dogmatics - after all, the word “dogmatics” does have a clear-cut ring! It is the present writer’s view that Bishop Ryle’s style at this point is refreshingly candid, and therefore valuable pastorally.

## 2.5 His Pastoral Motivation and Concern

This leads us to a further positive feature in Ryle's work - his determination to be faithful to his pastoral calling. Ryle did not defend the Inspiration of Scripture merely as a leader of a "party" within the church - he defended it because he was concerned for the welfare of the people of God committed to his charge. At the very first charge to the new diocese of Liverpool, the new bishop said: "Let us pray that there may be always found in the Diocese a trumpet which shall give no 'uncertain sound', and a Bishop who shall promote the real interests of the Reformed Church of England."<sup>(8)</sup> This pastoral concern is clearly what lies behind his defence of Inspiration, as is evident from the following statement in his paper on Inspiration:

"...the denial of verbal inspiration appears to me to *destroy a great part of the usefulness of the Bible as a source of comfort and instruction in private reading*. Where is the true Christian student of the Bible who does not know that words, particular words, afford a large portion of the benefit which he derives from his daily reading? How much the value of many a cherished text depends on some single phrase, or the number of a substantive, or the tense of a verb? Alas! there would be an end of all this if we once concede that each word is not inspired; and that for anything we know, some much loved favourite substantive, or verb...or adjective, was an Apostle's mistake, and the word of man, not of God! What others might think I know not. For myself, I should be tempted to lay aside my Bible in despair, and become of all men most miserable."<sup>(9)</sup>

We may smile at the exaggeration, and ask whether this extreme view is really justified, but undoubtedly Ryle's standpoint here is that of a pastor, anxious for the welfare of the flock. Hear his anger in the following admonition:

“Let us regard all who would damage the authority of the Bible, or impugn its credit, as spiritual robbers. We are travelling through a wilderness; they rob us of our only guide. We are voyaging over a stormy sea: they rob us of our only compass. We are toiling over a weary road: they pluck our staff out of our hands.....They would fain take from us the bread of life, and they do not give us in its place so much as a stone.”<sup>(10)</sup>

Without question, Ryle's sense of responsibility as a pastor has provoked his defence of Scripture.

### **3 WEAKNESSES IN RYLE'S PRESENTATION OF INSPIRATION**

However, even where one feels a sympathy for the bishop's position, there is a sense of disappointment at some aspects of his approach.

#### **3.1 His Reluctance to Answer Critical Arguments**

Perhaps it is fair to say that while Ryle is strong in criticism on the transcendental and pastoral level, he failed, on the “immanent” level, to deal adequately with the issues raised by the liberal element. Even if it may be allowed that he was not, as a pastor with wide responsibilities, able to give time to detailed refutation himself, there is hardly so much as a mention of scholarly orthodox responses to the rationalists. When one considers that Hengstenberg's work had been available for nearly a generation, and Green's

response to Colenso was published in 1863<sup>(11)</sup>, one feels that Ryle was remiss in not drawing attention to these works. In the area of New Testament criticism, Westcott's great work on the Canon had been before the public since 1855, and Lightfoot's painstaking labours on the Pauline literature was published in the 1865-1880 period. The absence of reference to these represents, admittedly with hindsight, a serious omission in Ryle's apologetic.

### **3.2 His Arguments Ignore the Rebuttal of Unbelievers**

Another weakness in the bishop's defence of Scripture is that while his traditional arguments appear convincing to the Christian, unbelievers have argued against every one of these. For example, far from the Unity of Scripture being self-evident to everyone, we find modern theologians positing several "theologies" of both Old and New Testaments. For example, Walter Kaiser points out:

"Ever since the second half of the eighteenth century, men of the Enlightenment and their intellectual descendants have found themselves compelled as men making decisions in research to press the case for the Scripture's multiplicity, variegation, and diversity. By and large, no internal coherence was possible since, in their estimation, the observed tensions amounted to contradictions. The same opinion continues to the present moment even in NT theology."<sup>(12)</sup>

This is not to say that the Unity of Scripture is not true, but rather that the evidence for it is more compelling if one is already a believer.



#### **4 CONCLUSION**

Perhaps this is the key to Ryle's approach. He is, after all, addressing believers, or at least the Christian constituency, nominal or otherwise. Operating within that circle, and at that time, his presentation is adequate. At any rate, it is a staunch stand for the great evangelical principle - the ultimate authority of the written Word of God.

## Part 1 The Doctrine of Scripture

### Chapter 7

#### THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

“The rationalists...unite in the common principle of exalting human reason, as either the sole and sufficient source, or at least the measure and judge, of all possible knowledge of God on the part of man.....The Romanists, who, denying that knowledge is necessary to genuine faith, or that faith is founded in any sense upon reason, maintain that the authority of the church, as an infallible teacher, is the ultimate foundation of all confidence; and that the holy Scriptures, and ecclesiastical tradition, as ascertained and interpreted by the church, are the sole sources of theological knowledge.”<sup>(1)</sup>

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

Ryle’s answer to the rationalists is found largely in his defence of the inspiration of Scripture; his answer to Rome is seen in his writings on the authority of Scripture. Over against Rome, and the Romeward tendencies within the Church of England, Ryle held to the supreme authority of the Scriptures as the final arbiter of religious controversy. In the opening chapter of “*Knots Untied*” he affirms: “The first leading feature in Evangelical Religion is the *absolute supremacy it assigns to Holy Scripture*, as the only rule of faith and practice, the only test of truth, the only judge of controversy.”<sup>(2)</sup>

## 2 THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

His emphasis on the doctrine, and the primary place he gives it, must be seen in the light of the controversies of his own time, and particularly the resurgence of medievalism in the “Ritualistic” party within Anglicanism, and the “Papal Aggression” of the second half of the Nineteenth Century. The promulgation of the decree of Papal Infallibility in 1870 no doubt added impetus to Ryle’s concern. That these factors were significant in influencing Ryle’s defence of the Authority of Scripture is evident from his own testimony. Hear him in “Principles for Churchmen”. As he affirms this absolute authority he adds:

“I see a complete answer to those Churchmen who tell us that we make an idol of the Bible, and that we ought to go to the Fathers, or to primitive tradition, or to the voice of the Church, or to the Prayer-book, for spiritual direction.”<sup>(3)</sup>

Here is the threat from within. But there is also the threat from outside, from Rome. In an article on the necessity for private judgment as against submission to merely ecclesiastical authority, the bishop writes:

“If ever there was a time in the world when Churches were put upon their trial, whether they would hold fast the truth or not, that time is the present time, and those Churches are the Protestant Churches of our own land. Popery, that old enemy of our nation, is coming in upon us in this day like a flood. We are assaulted by open enemies without, and betrayed continually by false friends within. The number of Roman Catholic churches, and chapels, and

schools, and conventual and monastic establishments, is continually increasing around us. Already the clergy of the Church of Rome are.. ..boasting that, sooner or later, England shall... ..take her place in the Catholic system.”<sup>(4)</sup>

Clearly, there was, for Ryle, an urgent need to assert the truth of the authority of Scripture in no uncertain terms.

### **3 PRESENTATION OF THE DOCTRINE**

He does this in two ways; formally, and informally. As to the latter, it is evident that in all Ryle’s controversies, expositions, and doctrinal treatises, his appeal is to Holy Writ. Examples of this have already been given in our previous work on Ryle<sup>(5)</sup>, and need not be repeated here.

In terms of formal presentation, the evangelical champion deals with the subject both by exposition, polemics, and apologetic.

#### **3.1 Expository Presentation**

In his exposition of the leading features of “Evangelical Religion”<sup>(6)</sup>, he sets forth the doctrine in his usual straightforward, even blunt, way. We quote at length:

“Its [Evangelical Religion’s] theory is that man is required to believe nothing, as necessary to salvation, which is not read in God’s Word written, or can be proved thereby. It totally denies that there is any other guide for man’s soul, co-equal or co-ordinate with the Bible. It refuses to listen to such arguments as “the Church says so”, - “the Fathers say so”, - “primitive antiquity says so”, -

“Catholic tradition says so”, - “the Councils say so”, - “the ancient liturgies say so”, - “the Prayer-book says so”,.... -unless it can be shown that what is said is in harmony with Scripture. The supreme authority of the Bible, in one word, is one of the cornerstones of our system. Show us anything plainly written in that Book, and, however trying to flesh and blood, we will receive it, believe it, and submit to it. Show us anything, as religion, which is contrary to that Book, and, however specious, plausible, beautiful, and apparently desirable, we will not have it at any price. It may come before us endorsed by Fathers, schoolmen, and catholic writers; - it may be commended by reason, philosophy, science, the inner light, the verifying faculty, the universal conscience of mankind. It signifies nothing. Give us rather a few plain texts. If the thing is not in the Bible, deducible from the Bible, or in manifest harmony with the Bible, we will have none of it. Like the forbidden fruit, we dare not touch it, lest we die. Our faith can find no resting-place except in the Bible, or in Bible arguments. Here is rock: all else is sand.’’(7)

This long extract sets out Ryle’s adherence to Biblical authority; it also defines its terms. It is the Bible above the church, whether the church dogmatic, the church historical or the church liturgical. It is also the Bible above human opinion, whether considered cognitively or intuitively. But it is not, for all Ryle’s vehemence, the strict Presbyterian position of “the regulative principle” - or, rather, it draws the line of that principle at a slightly

different place - there is room for that which is “in manifest harmony with the Bible” even if there is no *direct* biblical support for it. There is also room for what is “deducible from the Bible”, or, as the Westminster Confession expresses it, what “..by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture”<sup>(8)</sup>. In a word, the bishop holds to the classical Protestant position of “Sola Scriptura”.

## **3.2 Polemical and Apologetical Presentation**

Thus far it has been our aim to demonstrate Bishop Ryle’s adherence to the dogma of the final authority of Scripture. We now turn to his defence of his position. Here it appears that this defence has at least three main foundations.

### **3.2.1 The Formularies of the Church**

First, the formularies of the Church of England clearly advocate this standpoint. In a paper entitled “The Church’s Distinctive Principles”<sup>(9)</sup>, in which Ryle bases his entire argument on the 39 Articles of Religion<sup>(10)</sup>, the bishop sets out to show that these Articles, which reflect the official doctrinal position of the Church of England, support the doctrine of the final authority of Scripture. As he puts it, with his usual forthrightness: “The first distinctive principle of the Church of England appears to me to be its *unvarying reverence for holy Scripture*. It always recognizes “the supremacy and sufficiency” of God’s Word written, as the only rule of faith and practice. (Lambeth Synod. 1878.)”<sup>(11)</sup>. He goes so far as to say that “The supreme authority of Scripture, in short, is one of the corner-stones of the Church of England.”<sup>(12)</sup> This statement is followed by quotations from the 6th, 8th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 28th and 34th Articles, all of which are clearly germane to the

issue, so that he reaches the firm conclusion: “I see in all this abundant proof that the Bible, and the Bible only, is the rule of faith in the Church of England, and that no doctrine is “Church doctrine” which cannot be reconciled with God’s Word.”<sup>(13)</sup>

### 3.2.2 The Right to Private Judgement

Secondly, Ryle’s doctrine of Authority has as its corollary a strong protestant doctrine of the right to and responsibility of private judgment.<sup>(14)</sup> For Ryle, private judgment has a touchstone, Holy Scripture. “The principle laid down is this:..prove all things by the Word of God; - all ministers, all teaching...all doctrines...”<sup>(15)</sup> This proving is necessitated by the inadequacy of other authorities. Hear Ryle as he points out the unreliability of the rival authorities:

“Suppose that, in fear of private judgment, we resolve to believe whatever *the Church* believes. Where is our security against error? The Church is not infallible. There was a time when almost the whole of Christendom embraced the Arian heresy..... - The General *Councils of the Church are not infallible*. When the whole Church is gathered together in a General Council, what says our Twenty-first Article? “*They may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God*” ... - *The particular branches of the Church are not infallible*. Any one of them may err. Many of them have fallen foully, or have been swept away..... Ministers are not infallible, any more than Churches...The very best of them are only men.”<sup>(16)</sup>

### **3.2.3 Holy Scripture**

Thirdly, there is the testimony of Scripture itself. The Bible, according to Ryle, directs us to resolve our doctrinal difficulties by listening to its testimony.

He quotes with approval Isaiah 8:19 and Acts 17:11-12 as instancing the exercising of private judgment by referring others' teaching to the Scriptures for verification, even though, in the one case, the teacher was an apostle!<sup>(17)</sup> In one of his many exhortations to stand firmly by the Scriptures as the only rule of faith, he writes: "Let our only standard of truth be the Bible, God's word written." Then he adds a catena of Scripture: "What saith the Scripture?" - "What is written?" - "How readest thou?" - "To the law and the testimony!" - "Search the Scriptures."<sup>(18)</sup>

### **3.3.4 Summary of Ryle's Apologetic on Biblical Authority**

The Anglican Confession of Faith; the principle of Private Judgement; the Testimony of Scripture; these are the foundations of Ryle's views on the Authority of Scripture.

## **4 OBJECTIONS TO THE DOCTRINE AND THEIR REBUTTAL**

These foundations, particularly the first two, were assailed violently by the Ritualists and "High Church" party.

### **4.1 The Interpretation of the Formularies**

As far as the testimony of the 39 Articles were concerned, in addition to Newman's notorious Tract 90, the Articles were often interpreted by Ryle's opponents in a way that was antithetical to his own position. For example,



B.J.Kidd, in his text-book on the 39 Articles, sees in Article 6 a limiting of the direct authority of Scripture to the doctrine of salvation, and goes on to say:

“Even for this, (things necessary for salvation) the sanction required is not that it should be found in so many terms in Scripture, “or read therein.” Enough if it may be “proved thereby.” Moreover, if the further questions be raised, Who is to decide what is Scripture? or again, Who is to decide what Scripture means? i.e. what “may be proved thereby,” the answer to both is that this function rests not with the individual, but with the Church.....It was by reserving so large an area to the authority of the Church that the Church of England parted company with the foreign reforming bodies...”<sup>(19)</sup>

This of course is a virtual emasculation of the Authority of Scripture, and a challenge to Ryle’s interpretation. He was not unaware of the disagreement with his position. In his paper on “The Thirty-Nine Articles”<sup>(20)</sup>, our evangelical champion responds:

“No doubt men may say that the Articles admit of more than one interpretation, and that my interpretation is not the correct one. My reply to all this is short and simple. I ask in what sense the Reformers who drew up the Articles meant them to be interpreted? Let men answer that. It is an acknowledged axiom in interpreting all public documents, such as treaties, covenants, wills, articles of faith and religious formularies, that in any case of doubt or dispute the true sense is the sense of those who drew them up and imposed them....Upon this principle I take my stand...the conclusion...is that

the Thirty-Nine Articles are in general tone, temper ...and meaning, eminently Protestant and eminently Evangelical.”<sup>(21)</sup>

It is in this same article that Ryle has taught that the Authority of Scripture is upheld in the Articles, so that his general comment has legitimate specific reference. That the persons who drew up the Articles, and their associates, did in fact hold this view of Biblical Authority has been amply demonstrated by Dr.P.E. Hughes, in his most useful work, *“Theology of the English Reformers”*: His collation of the Reformers’ testimonies on the Authority of Scripture is incontrovertable evidence of the validity of Ryle’s position.<sup>(22)</sup>

#### **4.2 The Abuse of, and Ill-Effects of Private Judgement**

Regarding the right to private judgement, the accusation is that, on the one hand the right to private judgement has been abused, and that, on the other hand, it has done more harm than good.<sup>(23)</sup> The bishop deals with both arguments in short order! He says, concerning the first, “I would like the objector to tell me what good gift of God has not been abused?...Because many things are used improperly, are we to give them up altogether?”<sup>(24)</sup> As to doing more harm than good (because it has given rise to division), Ryle endeavours to show that the divisions are exaggerated, and that the harm is “but a drop of water when compared with the torrent of abominations that have arisen from the Church of Rome’s practice of disallowing private judgement altogether.”<sup>(25)</sup> He goes on to compare the fruit of the two alternatives, in his usual robust language:

“Give me Protestant variations...rather than Romish ignorance, Romish superstition, Romish darkness, and Romish idolatry. Give

me the Protestant diversities of England and Scotland, with all their disadvantages, rather than the dead level, both intellectual and spiritual, of the Italian peninsula. Let the two systems be tried by their fruits....in the hearts, in the intellects, in the lives, in all the ways of men, and I have no doubt as to the result.”<sup>(26)</sup>

## 5 CONCLUSION

So much then for Ryle’s exposition and defence of the Authority of Scripture. What of our evaluation? Let it be said at once that the worthy prelate’s exposition and emphases, together with his aggressive presentation, have to be seen against the historical background mentioned above. There can be no doubt that Ryle, as a loyal Churchman, saw the ritualism of his day as potentially destructive of the Protestantism of the Church of England, and with hindsight we can see that he was correct. He also saw that the key to the claims of the Tractarians and their successors lay in their acceptance of authorities other than that of Scripture. It was necessary therefore to emphasise the traditional doctrine, and to oppose the “Romeward” trend vigorously.

Our century has seen a modification of Rome’s position on tradition, largely as a result of Vatican II, but modern movements within the church catholic (as opposed to Roman Catholic) are again shifting the basis for authority away from the Scriptures, perhaps to human experience, the social situation or existential encounter, and, while it may be necessary to make the emphasis of Biblical Authority in terms of our particular problems, Ryle’s emphasis is full of lessons for us today.

## Part 2 The Doctrine of God

### Chapter 6

# THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

“There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” (The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion - Article 1)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

At this point, it is important to remind the reader again that the bishop’s writings were not formal theological treatises, but essentially pastoral, and therefore in a sense occasional, that is, written as he saw particular needs that had to be met among his readers. This consideration is of particular importance when we come to the doctrine of God. At first glance one is disappointed to find little discussion of such matters as the so-called “Rational Proofs”, or a formal consideration of the doctrine of the Trinity; indeed references to the Deity apart from His redemptive activity are rare, and scattered sparsely in the bishop’s works.

The subject of our study was an expositor, polemicist and apologist of the Evangelical Party. By his own admission, the marks of that party, and the truths it defended and expounded, related primarily to the authority of Scripture, human depravity, the “work and office of our Lord Jesus Christ”<sup>(1)</sup>, and the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion and sanctification.<sup>(2)</sup> In these

areas the bishop provides an abundance of theological material; outside these perimeters he has less to say. Having made this “caveat”, we will proceed to take up some of these “scattered thoughts” of the bishop, relating to the Doctrine of God.

## **2 REJECTION OF “NATURAL THEOLOGY”**

First of all, we must note how Ryle emphatically rejects the idea of “Natural Theology”. In his provocative paper, “Athens”<sup>(3)</sup>, preached at St. Mary’s, Oxford, before the University, the bishop, commenting on the idolatry that St. Paul saw there (Acts 17:16), observes that the idolatrous city bears witness to the necessity for Divine revelation<sup>(4)</sup>, and adds: “Old Athens is a standing lesson which we shall do well to observe. It is vain to suppose that nature, unaided by revelation, will ever lead man to nature’s God.”<sup>(5)</sup> He applies the Athenian situation to his contemporary world:-

“We have fallen on a sceptical and an unbelieving age. We meet on every side with doubts and questionings about the truth and value of revelation. “Is not reason alone sufficient?” - “Is the Bible really needful to make men wise unto salvation?” - “Has not man a light within, a verifying power, able to guide him to truth and God?” Such are the inquiries which fall thick as hail around us. Such are the speculations which disquiet many unstable minds....Our plain answer is an appeal to the facts. The remains of heathen Egypt, Greece, and Rome shall speak for us. They are preserved by God’s providence to this very day as monuments of what intellect and reason can do without revelation. The minds which designed the

temples of Luxor and Carnac, or the Parthenon or Coliseum, were not the minds of fools....The men who conceived the sculptured friezes, which we know as the Elgin Marbles, were trained and intellectual to the highest degree. And yet in religion these men were darkness itself (Eph.v.8) The sight which St.Paul saw at Athens is an unanswerable proof that man knows nothing which can do his soul good without a Divine revelation.”<sup>(6)</sup>

Or hear the bishop in his paper on “Bible Reading” in his book “*Practical Religion.*” Commenting on the inadequacy of mere learning to bring a man to salvation, the bishop affirms:

“No natural theology ever gave peace in the prospect of meeting a holy God. All these things are of the earth, earthly, and can never raise a man above the earth’s level. They may enable a man to strut and fret his little season here below with a more dignified gait than his fellow-mortals, but they can never give him wings, and enable him to soar towards heaven.”<sup>(7)</sup>

Fifty years before Karl Barth, Ryle has intimated that Natural Theology only ministers to idolatrous human pride! This explains the absence of discussion of the “Rational Proofs”!

### **3 THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES**

The existence of God, and the nature of His attributes were not, in Ryle’s eyes, a matter for doubt. Further, his presentation of the attributes was always practical, not merely academically theological. Take, for example, his

discussion of Matthew 19:26 - “..with God all things are possible.” In his exposition of the text, Ryle does not find a proof-text for the doctrine of the Omnipotence of God; rather he relates the text to the context and shows how the Almightyness of God is sufficient to turn the “wealth-lover” into a believer and disciple of Christ. To put it in his own words:

“The second thing that we learn in this passage, is *the almighty power of God’s grace in the soul*. The disciples were amazed, when they heard our Lord’s language about rich men. It was language so subversive of all their notions about the advantages of wealth, that they cried out with surprise, “Who then can be saved?” They drew from our Lord a gracious answer, “With men this is impossible: but with God all things are possible.” The Holy Ghost can incline even the richest of men to seek treasure in heaven. He can dispose even kings to cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus, and count all things but loss for the sake of the kingdom of God. Proof upon proof of this is given to us in the Bible. Abraham...Moses...Job...David... They all show us that “nothing is too hard for the Lord,” and that faith can grow even in the most unlikely soil.”<sup>(8)</sup>

This excerpt is typical of Ryle’s treatment of the doctrine of God. A further example may be found in his exposition of Matthew 6:1-8. One of the lessons drawn from this passage is related to the words: “Thy Father which seeth in secret” and “Your Father knoweth..” For Ryle, the great lesson is not merely that God is omniscient, but the practical implications of that. To quote:

“In all our duties, whether giving, or praying, the great thing to be

kept in mind is, *that we have to do with a heart-searching and all-knowing God ...* The one thing at which His all-seeing eye looks is the nature of our motives, and the state of our hearts. “Our Father seeth in secret.” ”<sup>(9)</sup>

A further example of Ryle’s practical design in handling doctrine, and, in our present context, the doctrine of the attributes of God, is found in his additional notes on John 4:24ff, where he attempts a theological explanation of a profound truth, and then draws a practical lesson from it for his contemporaries:

“The declaration before us is one of the most lofty and definite sayings about God’s nature which is to be found in the whole Bible.....To define precisely the full meaning of the expression is past man’s understanding. The leading idea most probably is, that “God is an immaterial being, that He dwelleth not in temples made with hands, and that He is not, like ourselves, therefore, absent from one place when He is present at another.” These things are all true, but how little we can realize them! [On the latter part of the verse]...Our Lord draws this broad conclusion from the statement of God’s nature which He has just made. If “God is a Spirit” it behoves those who would worship Him acceptably, to worship in spirit and in truth. It is unreasonable to suppose that He can like any worship which does not come from the heart...Any religious teaching which tends to depreciate heart-worship, and to turn Christianity into a mere formal service, or which tends to bring back



Jewish shadows, ceremonies, and services, and to introduce them into Christian worship, is on the face of these remarkable verses most unscriptural and deserving of reprobation.”<sup>(10)</sup>

The bishop is, of course, using the verse with polemical intent, against the Ritualists who were bringing in ritual practices which were a regression to the pre-Reformation era.

#### **4 THE TRINITY**

In such matters as the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Procession of the Holy Spirit, Ryle clearly affirms his orthodoxy and also acknowledges the mystery. Regarding the former, he sees in the events surrounding the baptism of Jesus, as recorded in Luke 3:21, “*..a remarkable proof of the doctrine of the Trinity.* We have all the Three Persons of the Godhead spoken of, as co-operating and acting at one time.”<sup>(11)</sup> Similarly, but more extensively, in his exposition of the last few verses of Matthew’s gospel, he writes:

“This is one of those great plain texts which directly teach the mighty doctrine of the Trinity. It speaks of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as Three distinct persons, and speaks of all three as co equal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. And yet these Three are One. This truth is a great mystery. Let it be enough to receive and believe it, and let us ever abstain from all attempts at explanation. It is childish folly to refuse assent to things that we do not understand. We are poor crawling worms of a day, and know little at our best about God and eternity. Suffice it for us

to receive the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity, with humility and reverence, and to ask no vain questions.’’(12)

With regard to the inter-relation of the Persons of the Godhead, Ryle exhibits the same caution, as we may see from his comments on John 15:26:

“...Our Lord speaks of the Holy Ghost as One whom He “will send from the Father,” and One “who proceedeth from the Father.” These are deep sayings, no doubt, so deep that we have no line to fathom them. The mere fact that for centuries the Eastern and Western Churches of Christendom have been divided about their meaning, should teach us to handle them with modesty and reverence. One thing, at all events, is very clear and plain. There is a close and intimate connection between the Spirit, the Father, and the Son. Why the Holy Ghost should be said to be *sent* by the Son, and to *proceed from* the Father, in this verse, we cannot tell. But we may quietly repose our minds in the thought expressed in an ancient creed, that “In this Trinity none is afore or after other: none is greater or less than another.”....Above all, we may rest in the comfortable truth that in the salvation of our souls all three Persons in the Trinity co-operate.’’(13)

The bishop’s admonition to us to accept these profound truths with unquestioning simplicity is no mere affectation; nor is it a device to avoid hard thinking. It is a clear illustration of the truth of the comment made by one of his most faithful and loyal friends, and his successor in the Diocese, Bishop Chavasse: “that man of granite with the heart of a child’’(14) However,

Ryle could never be content with orthodoxy without evangelistic and pastoral application. Thus, after his brief statement about the Trinity in Luke, quoted above, the bishop goes on to make the pastoral application:

“There is something deeply instructive, and deeply comforting in this revelation of the blessed Trinity, at this particular season of our Lord’s earthly ministry. It shows us how mighty and powerful is the agency that is employed in the great business of our redemption. It is the common work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. All Three Persons in the Godhead are equally concerned in the deliverance of our souls from hell. The thought should cheer us, when disquieted and cast down. The thought should hearten and encourage us, when weary of the conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil. The enemies of our souls are mighty, but the Friends of our souls are mightier still. The whole power of the Triune Jehovah is engaged upon our side. “A three-fold cord is not easily broken.” (Eccles.iv.12)”<sup>(14)</sup>

The Christian reader is not left with merely a formal doctrine; he is led to lean on the living Triune God! This is yet another example of the intensely practical nature of Ryle’s presentation of Christian doctrine.

## **5 THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD**

The last area of this doctrine which requires our attention is that of the Providence of God (excluding Predestination and Election which are reserved for consideration under the “Ordo Salutis”), and, as might be expected, Ryle deals with this in very practical terms. Notice how He deals with Luke 12:6-7:

“The providential care of God over all His creatures is strikingly taught in this and the following verse. Nothing was too little for God to create. Nothing is too little for God to preserve. Nothing that concerns God’s people is too little for Him to manage, or for them to bring before Him in prayer. Our least matters are in God’s hands.”<sup>(16)</sup>

This comment is in Ryle’s “Additional Note” to his exposition. In the exposition itself, he writes:

“The providential government of God over everything in this world is a truth of which the Greek and Roman philosophers had no conception. It is a truth which is specially revealed to us in the Word of God. Just as the telescope and microscope show us that there is order and design in all the works of God’s hand, from the greatest planet down to the least insect, so does the Bible teach us that there is wisdom, order, and design in all the events of our daily life. There is no such thing as “chance,” “luck,” or “accident” in the Christian’s journey through this world. All is arranged and appointed by God. And all things are “working together” for the believer’s good. (Rom.viii.28.) Let us seek to have an abiding sense of God’s hand in all that befalls us, if we profess to be believers in Jesus Christ. Let us strive to realize that a Father’s hand is measuring out our daily portion, and that our steps are ordered by Him.”<sup>(17)</sup>

## 6 CONCLUSION

As we conclude this survey of Ryle's understanding of the Doctrine of God, a pattern of the general drift of his theological ideal is becoming apparent. The bishop, quite clearly, believes that orthodox protestant doctrine is to give rise to warm devotion and sturdy discipleship; with equal firmness he insists that this devotion and discipleship must be grounded in biblical (and therefore protestant!) orthodoxy. Expressed another way, sound theology and practical Christian living are mutually necessary.

This may be a key to the absence of deep interaction with "Modern Thought" in his writings; given his mind-set and purposeful emphasis, he would probably regard the newer trends as speculative, and therefore unhelpful, whether to basic theological understanding or practical piety. We may regret his possible mis-reading of the situation with regard to the nature and causes of late Nineteenth Century doubt and infidelity, but we must credit Ryle with pursuing a pastoral course in keeping with his convictions.

## Part 3 The Doctrine of Man and Sin

### Chapter 9

#### MAN AS CREATED

“After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image...”

(The Westminster Confession of Faith: Chapter IV, Section II)

#### 1 INTRODUCTION: THE IMPACT OF EVOLUTION

The greatest impact on the orthodox doctrine of Man as created by God was undoubtedly that of the theory of evolution that burst upon the Victorian age, causing a Copernican revolution in Anthropology, Geology and a number of ancillary disciplines.

Although Lyell’s work in Geology, and Lamarck’s assertions with regard to organ modification had both, in measure, and with hindsight, presaged the Darwinian revolution, it is true to say, with Ian G. Barbour, that these advances “produced *no acute conflict between science and religion*”.<sup>(1)</sup> Darwin’s hypothesis, on the other hand, caused nothing short of a furore, and Barbour is surely responsible for a masterpiece of understatement when he describes the response from conservative protestants as “considerable reluctance to acknowledge...evolution”.<sup>(2)</sup>

Closer to the mark is J.R.H. Moorman, who comments: “Everywhere there was consternation and dismay.”<sup>(3)</sup>, a position supported by Carpenter in “*Church and People*”, where he shows that many saw the issue in terms of a

battle between Moses and Darwin..<sup>(4)</sup> The real points at issue, so far as the Doctrine of Man was concerned were the distinctiveness of man in the created order, and the basis of ethics. Darwin's hypothesis, especially as developed in his later work "*The Descent of Man*" could hardly be seen, at face value, as anything less than an attack on those two traditional beliefs. It is true that some orthodox theologians accommodated their beliefs to the Darwinian theories, but Darwin himself, and his "bulldog" T.H. Huxley certainly viewed his work as fatally destructive of the traditional Christian position.

## **2 RYLE'S RETICENCE ON EVOLUTION**

### **2.1 The Fact of His Reticence**

One would have expected that J.C.Ryle would have been one of Barbour's "conservative protestants" in the matter of the implications of Darwin for theology, but as far as this is concerned, a perusal of the bishop's published works has failed to reveal any extended reference to evolution. It is not possible that Ryle could have been ignorant of Darwin, and thus we have to consider why this evangelical polemicist never took up the cudgels for creation against this "philosophical novelty".

### **2.2 The Reason for His Reticence**

The absence of direct evidence makes our answer speculative, but we may find a clue in a paper by Ryle entitled "Our Souls".<sup>(5)</sup> The context of Ryle's statement, quoted at length below, is his insistence on the fact of the soul's existence, and its quality of immortality - "Every one has within him an undying soul."<sup>(6)</sup> From that point he continues:

“I do not stop to prove this. It would be a mere waste of time. There is a conscience in all mankind which is worth a thousand metaphysical arguments. There is a voice within, which speaks out loudly at times, and will be heard, - a voice which tells us, whether we like it or not, that we have, every one of us, an undying soul. What though we cannot see our souls? We can *fee*/them. When we are alone, on the bed of sickness, and the world is shut out, - when we watch by the death-bed of a friend, when we see those whom we love lowered into the grave, - at times like these, who does not know the feelings which come across men’s minds? Who does not know that in hours like these something rises in the heart, telling us that there is a life to come, and that all, from the highest to the lowest, have undying souls? You may go all over the world, and take the evidence of every age and time. You will never receive but one answer on this subject....you will not find a nation or people amongst whom there is not some consciousness that there is a life to come... - all, all speak with the same voice, and tell the same story. Far down in the human heart, beneath the rubbish heaped up by the Fall, there is an inscription which nothing can efface, telling us that this world is not all, and that every one has an undying soul.”<sup>(7)</sup>

Now of course the good bishop is not dealing with the creation of man as such, but he *is* dealing with the distinctiveness of man, and his special significance as a “soul-bearer”. And Ryle is so satisfied with the character and quality of the evidence of this distinctiveness, that he sees it as worth “a



thousand metaphysical arguments''. May we not assume then, that he might well have viewed the Darwinian position as being of little consequence, when measured against the universal evidence of this awesome dignity of *homo sapiens*? And the fact that Darwin's joint-author of the theory of natural selection, A.R.Wallace, was of the opinion that man's higher faculties were not the product of natural selection and might point to the existence of a Creator<sup>(8)</sup>, may have influenced Ryle's thinking, and allayed his fears. It is also just possible that Ryle recalled Wilberforce's mauling by Huxley in their famous debate on evolution.

### **2.3 Criticism of His Reticence**

So much for speculation; the undeniable fact remains that Ryle did not, as far as we know, advert at any great length, to the theory in his writings. Faced with this startling omission, even the most sympathetic student of the bishop's ministry must see in it a serious error of judgement. The intellectual challenge and theological implications of the theory of evolution are too far reaching to be ignored. Ryle might have joined those orthodox churchmen who were able to reconcile, to their own satisfaction at least, Darwin and Moses, or he might have associated himself with men like Bishop Wilberforce or Dean Wace who picked up the gauntlet of the evolutionists. But to have written extensively, as he did, against the inroads of liberalism and the "neologians" without taking up this momentous issue is really inexplicable in a man of his undoubted stature and influence. D.S. Allison is undoubtedly correct when he comments about evangelical churchmen generally in their inadequate responses to the intellectual challenges of the Victorian era:

“When such ideas have been introduced to the world of thought the church is not at liberty to ignore them and carry on as if nothing had happened - that would be to abandon those who genuinely search for truth in the intellectual world and who eventually mould public opinion. Theology, even the old and orthodox theology, must be presented anew for each age.”<sup>(9)</sup>

It cannot be denied that in this instance our esteemed evangelical champion was found wanting. However, in mitigation, it is to be noted that Ryle’s theology was built on his presuppositional foundation - that of an inerrant propositional revelation - and that all his expositions assume the validity of that foundation. This means that biblical statements are taken at face-value, and are not to be the subject of debate.

In any event, the dogma of “Man as created” is not a prominent element in Ryle’s work - it is not part of the distinctively “Evangelical Truth”. That is not to say that it is denied, far from it, but it is to say that it is not given the prominence that it has, for example, in F.D.Maurice. It is easy to see now that a theology that emphasises redemption at the cost of a loss of emphasis on creation leads to serious distortion, but the battle that evangelicals had fought for generations had been in the area of soteriology and it is not difficult to see why they were slow to understand the need for a sound prelapsarian anthropology.

### **3 THE HOLINESS OF UNFALLEN MAN**

It remains to us to note the simple and straightforward comments that Bishop Ryle has given us on the subject of man as a created being. In his sermon

“Regeneration”, Ryle, in pointing out the difference between man fallen and unfallen comments: “Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were created holy, harmless, undefiled, without spot or stain or blemish about them; and when God rested from His labour on the seventh day, He pronounced them, like all His other works, to be very good.”<sup>(10)</sup> But there is no exposition of the text; it merely serves to provide a contrast with what follows, *viz.*, man’s present fallen estate!

#### **4 UNFALLEN MAN A RELIGIOUS BEING**

In similar fashion, Ryle touches on man’s need for religion - a need that whether expressed in sophistication or simplicity is basic to his nature. But once again, this is only mentioned in the context of the corruption of that religious spirit in idolatry.<sup>(11)</sup>

#### **5 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, we must see the paucity of material on this aspect of biblical anthropology as characteristic of nineteenth century evangelicalism in general, and J.C.Ryle in particular, and as evidence of a serious failure to grasp the importance of the doctrine of Creation. This weakness was itself the product of the need to emphasise the depravity of man amid the liberal optimism of the Victorian era regarding man’s inevitable march to perfection. On the subject of man as fallen the bishop was much more eloquent, as we shall see.

## Part 3 The Doctrine of Man and Sin

### Chapter 10

#### **MAN AS FALLEN (Part 1) THE FALL; ORIGINAL SIN**

“Original Sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk); but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is ingendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God’s wrath and damnation... The condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God: Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing [i.e. “going before”] us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.”

(The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion: Articles IX & X.)

#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The sad paucity of material in Ryle’s writings on man as created is abundantly compensated for by the plethora of references to man in his fallen condition! Before analysing this material, it will be as well to explain this emphasis.

## 2 THE IMPORTANCE FOR EVANGELICALS OF THE DOCTRINE OF DEPRAVITY

In his introductory chapter to *“Knots Untied”*, Ryle sets forth as the second “leading feature” of Evangelical Religion, “*the depth and prominence it assigns to the doctrine of human sinfulness and corruption.*”<sup>(1)</sup> He goes on to explain the reason for this emphasis:

“We hold that a mighty spiritual disease like this requires a mighty spiritual medicine for its cure. We dread giving the slightest countenance to any religious system of dealing with man’s soul, which even *seems* to encourage the notion that his deadly wound can be easily healed. We dread fostering man’s favourite notion that a little church-going and sacrament-receiving,-a little patching, and mending, and whitewashing, and gilding, and polishing, and varnishing, and painting the outside, - is all that his case requires.....Man is radically diseased, and man needs a radical cure. I believe that ignorance of the extent of the fall, and of the whole doctrine of original sin, is one grand reason why many can neither understand, appreciate, nor receive Evangelical Religion.”<sup>(2)</sup>

Clearly, then, we can see that if a doctrine is basic to an overall theological position we may anticipate that it will be fully and repeatedly expounded. And such is indeed the case. An almost cursory glance at the contents pages of the bishop’s written works reveals the following titles: *Alive or Dead; Our Sins; The Heart; Sin; Lot - A Beacon; Without Christ; A Bad Heart; Self-Righteousness; Formality.* Less obviously, yet just as clearly occupied

with human depravity, are the various papers on regeneration, and many of his comments on passages in the gospels, expounded in his “*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*”. Regarding the latter, we may affirm that Ryle never misses an opportunity to expound the evangelical view of sin whenever the issue is present in the gospel accounts, and without, at this stage, wearying the reader with quotations, we would ask that the writer’s assurance on this matter be accepted. Our exposition of Ryle’s theology on this subject will furnish abundant proof of the assertion in due course.

### **3 THE HISTORICITY OF THE FALL**

We commence our examination of Ryle’s understanding of “Man as Fallen” with a consideration of his view of the Fall. As might be expected he is insistent that the Fall be regarded as an historical event. His treatment of the subject in his various papers always assumes the historicity of the fall, but it is in his “*Charges and Addresses*” as Bishop of Liverpool, giving guidance and direction to his clergy, that he makes his most definite statement to this effect. Hear him as he speaks to the Liverpool Diocesan Conference in 1892. He expresses his dissent from “the leading principles of the advocates of the “Higher Criticism” of the Old Testament, about the authorship of its books, the dates at which they were composed, and the historical reality of the persons and events named and mentioned in them”.<sup>(3)</sup> He rejects

“as utterly incredible...the strange, but painfully common idea that Old Testament history is nothing more than “a huge halo of legendary matter surrounding a small nucleus of truth”....[and believes] that all the wonderful events related in these books did

actually take place, such as the Fall, the Flood, the dispersion after the building of Babel..’’(4)

Far from being apologetic about belief in the historicity of the fall, Ryle regards it as providing the only adequate explanation of the observable human condition. His comments in this regard are illuminating, and we therefore quote them *in extenso*:

“That one and the same creature should be in some things so high and in others so low - so great and yet so little - so noble and yet so mean - so grand in his conception and execution of material things, and yet so grovelling and debased in his affections - ...all this is a sore puzzle to those who sneer at “God’s Word written” and scoff at us as Bibliolaters. But it is a knot that we can untie with the Bible in our hands. We can acknowledge that man has all the marks of a majestic temple about him - a temple in which God once dwelt, but a temple which is now in utter ruins - a temple in which a shattered window here, and a doorway there, and a column there, still give some faint idea of the magnificence of the original design, but a temple which from end to end has lost its glory and fallen from its high estate. And we say that nothing solves the complicated problem of man’s condition but the doctrine of original or birth-sin and the crushing effects of the fall....For my part, I know no stronger proof of the inspiration of Genesis and the Mosaic account of the origin of man, than the power, extent and universality of sin. Grant that mankind have all sprung from one pair, and that this pair fell (as

Gen. iii tells us), and the state of human nature everywhere is easily accounted for. Deny it, as many do, and you are at once involved in inexplicable difficulties. In a word, the uniformity and universality of human corruption supply one of the most unanswerable instances of the enormous “difficulties of infidelity.” ”(5)

As this long quotation shows, Ryle not only defends the idea of a “space/time” fall, he argues for it as the only reasonable explanation of the enigma of man’s greatness and misery, of the apparently baffling contradictions of the human condition.

#### **4 THE TRANSMISSION OF ADAM’S SIN**

Closely linked to the fall, as indeed the above quotation shows, is the question of the transmission of Adam’s sin to the race and the consequent “original sin”, or as the Thirty-nine Articles express it, “birth-sin”.<sup>(6)</sup> Ryle’s belief in this doctrine was absolute, and expressed most forcibly in many of his writings.

At the same time, he follows the 39 Articles in not asserting precisely how Adam’s sin is transmitted to the race. He does not appear to argue for either the “Federal” theory, or the “Realistic” Theory, but seems to be content to apply the reality to his readers in terms of its practical effects.

A good example of this is found in Ryle’s sermon on Regeneration in “*The True Christian*”. Arguing for the absolute necessity for regeneration Ryle says:

“Why, then, is this change of heart so necessary? The answer is



short and simple. Because of the natural sinfulness of every man's disposition. We are not born into the world with spotless, innocent minds, but corrupt and wicked, and with a will to the thing which is evil as soon as we have the power; and the Scriptural account is true to the letter - we are all conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity. I need not stop now to tell you how all this came to pass; I need only remind you that in the beginning it was not so. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were created holy, harmless, undefiled, without spot or stain or blemish about them....But alas for us! Adam, by transgression, fell, and lost his first estate; he forfeited the likeness of God in which he had been made; and hence all we, who are his children, come into being with a defiled and sinful nature. We are fallen, and we must needs be raised; we have about us the marks of the old Adam - Adam the first, earthly and carnal - and we must needs be marked with the marks of the Second Adam, the Lord Jesus, which are heavenly and spiritual.''(7)

Clearly, Ryle does not believe a theological explanation of the *modus operandi* is necessary; what is immediately important to his readers and hearers (for the most part not professional theologians) is that they recognise the fact and its effects. This is, of course, characteristic of the bishop's method, and in keeping with his consistently practical aim.

As far as the present writer is able to ascertain, Bishop Ryle makes no reference, in his works relating to original sin, to the *guilt* of Adam's sin being imputed (contrast the Westminster Confession)<sup>(8)</sup>, and in this he is following

the 39 Articles of Religion of his church. The classical Anglican confession is content to say that it is “the fault and corruption of the *Nature* of every man, that naturally is ingendered of the offspring of Adam”<sup>(9)</sup>, and it seems that Ryle follows this lead.

## **5 THE EFFECTS OF ORIGINAL SIN**

However, as to the effects of original sin, the evangelical bishop is by no means so reticent! As to the extent of its effect on each and every member of the human race, he writes, with an urgent eloquence engendered by his pastoral concern:

“Concerning the EXTENT of this vast moral disease of man called sin, let us beware that we make no mistake. The only safe ground is that which is laid for us in Scripture. “Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart” is by nature “evil, and that continually.”- “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” (Gen. vi. 5; Jer. xvii. 9.) Sin is a disease which pervades and runs through every part of our moral constitution and every faculty of our minds. The understanding, the affections, the reasoning powers, the will, are all more or less infected. Even the conscience is so blinded that it cannot be depended on as a sure guide, and is as likely to lead men wrong as right, unless it is enlightened by the Holy Ghost...The disease may be veiled under a thin covering of courtesy, politeness, good manners, and outward decorum; but it lies deep down in the constitution.”<sup>(10)</sup>

Ryle elsewhere develops this idea of extensive corruption in a paper entitled “Alive or Dead”, in his book “*Old Paths*”: Writing of the universal need for a changed heart, he goes on to particularise:

“Whatever part of the globe we live in, our *eyes* need to be opened: naturally we never see our sinfulness, guilt and danger. Whatever nation we belong to our *understandings* need to be enlightened: naturally we know little or nothing of the plan of salvation; like the Babel-builders, we think to get to heaven our own way. Whatever church we may belong to, our *wills* need to be bent in the right direction:- naturally we should never choose the things that are for our peace; we should never come to Christ. Whatever be our rank in life, our *affections* need to be turned to things above: - naturally we only set them on things below, earthly, sensual, short-lived and vain.”<sup>(11)</sup>

Thus Ryle insists that the intellectual, volitional and emotional elements in man are all vitiated by original sin.

## **6 THE POWER OF ORIGINAL SIN AND TOTAL INABILITY**

But it is not merely the effect of original sin that Ryle expounds. He is equally concerned that we should have a proper estimate of its power. Thus, in his footnote to his comments on John 3:6 he states:

“Human nature is so utterly fallen, corrupt, and carnal, that nothing can come from it by natural generation, but a fallen, corrupt, and carnal offspring. There is no self-curative power in man...To become

spiritual and fit for communion with God nothing less is required than the entrance of the Spirit of God into our hearts.’”(12)

And this power, although much reduced by the new birth, is still to be reckoned with in the Christian’s life. To quote again from the paper on “Sin”:

“..I am convinced that the greatest proof of the extent and power of sin is the pertinacity with which it cleaves to man even after he is converted and has become the subject of the Holy Ghost’s operations. To use the language of the Ninth Article, “this infection of nature doth remain - yea, even in them that are regenerate.” So deeply planted are the roots of human corruption, that even after we are born again...made living members of Christ, these roots remain alive in the bottom of our hearts, and like leprosy in the walls of the house, we never get rid of them until the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved.”(13)

## **7 CONCLUSION**

Bishop Ryle’s teaching on the question of Original Sin may be summarised as first, a recognition of it as a Biblical truth and existential reality without a precise definition of the exact reason for its presence other than its origins in the Fall; and second, an insistence on facing up to its pervasiveness and power in the lives of men - a power that can only be minimised and checked by the miracle of the new birth. As always, Ryle’s theology at this point is essentially practical, not speculative.

## Part 3 The Doctrine of Man and Sin

### Chapter 11

# MAN AS FALLEN (Part 2) THE CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND TO RYLE'S EXPOSITION

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The most cursory examination of the writings of Bishop Ryle reveals a plethora of material on the subject of man's sinfulness, and it will be as well to pause for a moment and ask why this should be the case. Of course, the subject of man's sinfulness has always been a platform in evangelical preaching, whether we look at the reformers, the 17th Century puritans, or the preaching of the 18th and 19th Century revivalists. But one suspects that there is more to Ryle's emphasis than this. After all, the bishop was not writing in a particularly profligate age such as that which his 18th Century forbears, Whitefield and Wesley had to contend with.

On the contrary, on his own admission, Ryle was writing in a time when the profession of religion was, at least in many circles, popular, and when the churches were full. For the record, here is his testimony given in 1878, in his book *"Practical Religion"*:

“There never were so many signs of religion in the land, so many sermons preached, so many services held in churches and chapels, so many Bibles sold, so many religious books and tracts printed, so many Societies for evangelizing mankind supported, so much outward respect paid to Christianity.”<sup>(1)</sup>

Why, then, such an insistence on the doctrine of human sinfulness? In letting the bishop speak for himself about his reasons for what some might think a morbid emphasis, we find that there were three particular outlooks with which he found himself obliged to contend, viz., religious carelessness, the optimism of the rationalists and “neologians”, and the approach of the “ritualists”.

## **2 CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS CARELESSNESS**

Religious carelessness and consequent unconcern about sin and its necessary entail, judgement, were matters of the deepest concern to Bishop Ryle. In spite of the religious interest described above, the bishop knew that this was not the total picture. To quote him again from the same paper:

“Thousands of English people, I fear, never give the subject of religion any place in their thoughts. From the beginning of the year to the end they are absorbed in the pursuit of business, pleasure, politics, money, or self-indulgence of some kind or another. Death, and judgment, and eternity, and heaven, and hell, and a world to come, are never calmly looked at and considered. They live on as if they were never going to die, or rise again, or stand at the bar of God, or receive an eternal sentence!....It is hard to imagine a life more unworthy of an immortal creature than such a life as I have just described, for it reduces a man to a level of a beast. But it is literally and truly the life of multitudes in England; and as they pass away their place is taken by multitudes like them..... - men who think of everything under the sun except the one thing needful, - the salvation of their souls.”<sup>(2)</sup>

### **3 CONTEMPORARY RATIONALISTIC RELIGIOUS OPTIMISM**

The second point of view with which the evangelical champion took issue was the optimism about man's nature displayed by the rationalists of Ryle's day. This was the time when Swinburne could write the triumphant last line of his "Hymn to Man": "Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things"<sup>(3)</sup>, and, in the lesser known quotation, speak confidently about the "holy spirit of man".<sup>(4)</sup> Again, while the theory of human evolution posited a brute origin of man, it viewed progress to a higher morality to be inevitable, albeit a prolonged process.<sup>(5)</sup>

Marx had already indicated his view that "alienated man" could be made whole by the resolution of the class struggle, and that his problem was "property" not sin<sup>(6)</sup>, and Rousseau's influence on Western thought was still evident. But of all the elements of this optimism, none was so repugnant to J.C.Ryle as the ideas that sincerity apart from truth was sufficient to ensure salvation, and that sin itself could be treated lightly. He adverts to these time and time again, and almost always in the contexts of theological liberalism<sup>(7)</sup>, or the tendency to blame external circumstances for sin, rather than the human heart.<sup>(8)</sup>

#### **3.1 The Adequacy of Sincerity apart from Truth**

As to the former of these ideas, hear Ryle as he speaks out against those who say of others, irrespective of their beliefs, that "if they are sincere and earnest, we hope they will be saved even as we."<sup>(9)</sup> Ryle calls this (and the italics are his!) "*the utter absurdity of supposing that we ought to be satisfied with a*

*man's state of soul, if he is only earnest and sincere.*” To this he responds indignantly:

“Now I believe that such notions are entirely contradictory to the Bible, whatever else they may be. I cannot find in Scripture that any one ever got to heaven merely by sincerity, or was accepted with God if he was only earnest in maintaining his own views. The priests of Baal were earnest and sincere when they cut themselves with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out; but that did not prevent Elijah from commanding them to be treated as wicked idolaters. Manasseh, King of Judah, was doubtless earnest and sincere when he burned his children in the fire to Moloch; but who does not know that he brought on himself great guilt by so doing? - The Apostle Paul, when a Pharisee, was earnest and sincere while he made havoc of the Church, but when his eyes were opened he mourned over this as a special wickedness. Let us beware of allowing for a moment that sincerity is everything, and that we have no right to speak ill of a man's spiritual state because of the opinions he holds, if he is only *earnest* in holding them.”<sup>(10)</sup>

### **3.2 Sin Blamed on the External Environment**

As to the second view, we offer the following example of Ryle's response:

“Some talk of bad example having done them harm, and some say they have had a bad education, but the evil is far more deeply seated; that which is born of the flesh is flesh, it comes from the carnal unrenewed mind, and the remedy wanted is change of nature.”<sup>(11)</sup>



#### 4 CONTEMPORARY “RITUALISTIC” REMEDIES FOR SIN

We are left, then, with the third great opposing viewpoint that Ryle had to deal with in expounding the sinfulness of man - the ritualist view that man's sinfulness was such as could be remedied by the rites and practices of external religion. Of course the “Ritualising Party” in the Church of England was constantly gaining ground during the latter part of the 19th Century, and Bishop Ryle rightly understood that this party's success would vitiate the classically reformed position of the church. Among the tenets of Anglo-Catholicism were a “high” view of the sacraments and the encouragement of auricular confession, and these tended, in Ryle's view, to mean an inadequate view of the seriousness of man's fallenness and spiritual need.

It is undoubtedly this view that he has in mind when, in outlining the main features of Evangelical Religion, he mentions the inadequacy of dealing with sin with “a little church-going and sacrament-receiving, - a little patching, and mending, and whitewashing..”<sup>(12)</sup> He expands somewhat on this in his paper “Our Sins” in “*Old Paths*”:

“It will not cleanse away your sins to become *diligent in the use of the forms and ordinances of religion*. You may alter your habits about Sunday and attend services from morning to night;...you may receive the Lord's Supper on every possible occasion...But all the means of grace in the world will never do you any good so long as you trust in them as saviours. They will not bind up the wounds of your heart, and give you inward peace..... It will not cleanse away your sins *to look to man for help*. It is not in the power of any child

of Adam to save another's soul. No bishop, no priest, no ordained man of any denomination has power to forgive sins: no human absolution, however solemnly conferred, can purge that conscience which is not purged by God....It is not in the power of any minister to deliver any man from his guilt....It requires a hand far stronger than that of man to take the chains off conscience, and set the prisoner free.''(13)

## **5 CONCLUSION**

Having, as it were, cleared the ground by establishing the reason for Ryle's emphasis on human sinfulness, we are now in a position to make a detailed study of his treatment of this subject.

## Part 3 The Doctrine of Man and Sin

### Chapter 12

# MAN AS FALLEN: SIN IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE

“Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing good, and prone to all wickedness? Yes; unless we are born again by the Spirit of God.”

(The Heidelberg Catechism: Question and Answer 8.)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Ryle’s treatment of this aspect of hamartiology is traditional and practical, and characteristic of the evangelical approach of his day.

## 2 THE SEAT OF SIN - THE HEART

It will be as well for us to begin with the bishop’s exposition of the doctrine of the seat of sin - the heart. In the collection of sermons published as “*The True Christian*” Ryle begins with a series of sermons on Regeneration, and the first of these is entitled “A Bad Heart”, based on Jeremiah 17:9-10.

This sermon is such a thorough exposition both of Ryle’s view of the subject, and his own inimitable way of teaching, that it is proposed to examine it in detail, and then draw some conclusions from it. Concerned to convince his hearers and readers of the solemn truth of the text, he produces a catena of biblical texts, including verses from Genesis, I Kings, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, and the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, all setting forth the wickedness of man in general, in darkest terms. Then, referring to the unwillingness of people to acknowledge their own wickedness and the radical

nature of their serious moral disorder, he adds, ironically,

“O this pure heart, this good heart which people speak of!-these are not texts which describe the character of the wicked only: they are written generally of all mankind, of you and me and the whole world, and they ought to be sufficient proof of that which Solomon declares: “He that trusteth his own heart is a fool””(1)

Aware that the sinner is resourceful in turning the edge of scripture away from his conscience, he goes on:

“...you may flatter yourselves that these are all single texts, and probably do not mean something quite so strong as I have made them appear. Be not deceived; you will find nothing to encourage you to think well of yourself; man’s natural character is everywhere described in the same colours, - it is all black, very black.”(2)

Ryle then goes on to show that not only in its textual statements, but in its historical accounts of human behaviour, Scripture “supplies us with countless examples of our inclination towards sin, unless we are restrained and bent back by the grace of God.”(3) He points to the antediluvians, the post-diluvian apostasy, Sodom and Gomorrah, Israel in Egypt, and afterwards, their rejection of God’s word and Messiah, in spite of the divine privileges they enjoyed. Not only communities, but families, whether Adam’s, Noah’s, Abraham’s, Isaac’s, Jacob’s, Eli’s, David’s, or Hezekiah’s, are affected; every family has a member notorious for sin.(4) But our preacher does not stop even there; he goes on: “I say that you can hardly turn to a single character, among

the holy men described in the Bible, who did not, to his own horror and dismay, fall at one time or another.”<sup>(5)</sup> We are then referred to Noah, David and Peter as examples, to prove “beyond a question that the most excellent of the earth have found that the root of all their sinfulness is within them”<sup>(6)</sup>

All the evidence adduced by Ryle is intended to show that the Bible “contains the true description of man’s heart, it strips off the flimsy coverings which pride and self-conceit throw over our natural dispositions, and it shows us man as he really is”<sup>(7)</sup> Still pursuing the thought of the inward corruption of man, Ryle next points to the evidence of the corruption of everyday life in England<sup>(8)</sup>, a corruption that manifests itself, not in conditions of heathen darkness, but in “England, which professes to be a Christian country,....in the face of God who sees it all, and the Bible which condemns it all, and the Church which witnesses against it all.”<sup>(9)</sup> For Ryle, the only adequate explanation for this is the truth of his text concerning the wickedness of the human heart<sup>(10)</sup>, so he asserts: “There must be some hidden cause and fountain within us, or men would never be guilty of such enormous folly.”<sup>(11)</sup>

Relentlessly, the preacher adds another line of evidence - the commitment of men and women to an excessive concern about the outward and transient spheres of life, contrasted with their neglect of the inward and eternal. As he expresses it : “What, then, is the reason that men are so active and industrious in their business and so careless about their souls?”<sup>(12)</sup> This relates to their diligence, their relationships, their assessment of conduct, their acquisition of knowledge, and their attitude to their own mortality.<sup>(13)</sup> Ryle summarises this argument thus: “Man, so wise, so prudent, so thoughtful as he is about the life

that now is, seems a fool in the matter of the world to come. And why? He has within him “a heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.””(14) We may of course explain this kind of conduct in our day as the effect of secularisation, but in Victorian England Bishop Ryle’s argument had to be taken seriously.

Our evangelist’s last appeal is to the conduct and experience of contemporary professing Christians - their unwillingness to bow to the sterner affirmations of the Bible; their hearing and not doing; their outward formality in religion without the inward reality; their self-deception about their spiritual state and their attempts to deceive others about the same.(15)

But when he has collected the evidence and impressed it on the hearts of his hearers, our preacher has not finished, even now! Citing the ignorance even of saints like David, and Job, and Peter, about the depths of their own inward propensity for sin, the bishop pleads with us: “Oh, pray, beloved, if you love your souls, for some insight into your own corruption; the veriest saints of God do never quite discover the exceeding sinfulness of that old man which is in them.”(16)

This survey demonstrates Ryle’s convictions as to the radical cause of the human sinful condition, - the heart, spiritually deranged and fatally infected, directs the man towards perdition, and deceives him as to his actual state and peril. But it also gives us an insight to the preacher’s heart, and we see that for John Charles Ryle, the issue of sin could be no mere academic theological truth, but a tragedy influencing human life both now and in the world to come, a tragedy whose terrible effects had to be countered here and now, and

urgently. As we have noticed time and time again, Ryle's theology, traditional though it may have been, was applied by him as relevantly and powerfully as he knew how!

In keeping with his exposition analysed above, Ryle strikes the same note in his '*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*. Commenting on Mark 7:14-23 he declares:

“There is a deep truth in these words which is frequently overlooked. Our original sinfulness and natural inclination to evil are seldom sufficiently considered. The wickedness of men is often attributed to bad examples, bad company, peculiar temptations, or the snares of the devil. It seems forgotten that every man carries within him a fountain of wickedness. We need no bad company to teach us, and no devil to tempt us, in order to run into sin. We have within us the beginning of every sin under heaven.....All of us have by nature such a heart as Jesus here describes. The seeds of all the evils here mentioned lie hid within us all. They may lie dormant all our lives. They may be kept down by the fear of consequences - the restraint of public opinion - the dread of discovery - the desire to be thought respectable - and, above all, by the almighty grace of God. But every man has within him the root of every sin.”<sup>(17)</sup>

### **3 THE MEASURING-ROD OF SIN - THE LAW**

Bishop Ryle's exposition of the law follows the usual Reformed understanding of the Law as “Schoolmaster” to drive us to Christ, and “rule and guide” for holy living.<sup>(18)</sup> To quote his exact word as to its former role: “The law of the

Ten Commandments is God's eternal measure of right and wrong. By it is the knowledge of sin. By it the Spirit shows men their need of Christ, and drives them to Him."<sup>(19)</sup> Sin, to be shown up for what it is, must be seen against this Divine measure.

In his printed sermon, "The LORD our Righteousness"<sup>(20)</sup>, Ryle with his customary eloquence shows the law in this measuring, and therefore condemning, role. (We take the liberty of quoting him *in extenso* so that the full flavour of his declamation can be savoured.)

"Look at the law of God, and measure its requirements. Does it not ask of every man a perfect, unsinning obedience from first to last, in thought and word and deed, without one single failure in the slightest jot or tittle? And where is the son or daughter of Adam who can say, "All this I have performed"? Who is not conscious of a daily falling short in everything he does? I do not speak so much of thieves and liars and adulterers and drunkards and the like, for these are walking towards their own place, leaning on Satan's arm. I speak rather of those who do not live in great vices; I would even take the case of the best Christian among ourselves, and ask him if he can name a single day on which he has not sinned in many things. Oh, how much he would tell you of wandering in his prayers, of defilement in his thoughts, of coldness toward God, of want of love, of pride, of evil tempers, of vanity, of worldly-mindedness! - and all, remember, in the heart of one of those few who are travelling in the narrow way which leadeth unto life. And



how shall we then believe, though all the world persuade us to the contrary, that man can ever purchase his acceptance in the sight of God? So true are the words of that clear-sighted witness ... Paul, “By the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified.” ”(21)

#### **4 THE SERIOUSNESS OF SIN**

In bringing this study of Ryle’s hamatology to a close, it will be as well to take a brief look at the bishop’s insistence that the whole issue of human sinfulness be taken with the utmost seriousness. This is expressed clearly in his paper, “Reality”, in his book “*Practical Religion*” (22). In calling on his readers to examine themselves as to the reality of their religion, Ryle takes up the attitude of professing Christians towards the issue of sin. Once again we quote at length to bring out the depth of his concern:

“In the next place, if you would know whether your religion is real, try it by the *feeling towards sin* which it produces. The Christianity which is from the Holy Ghost will always have a very deep view of the sinfulness of sin. It will not merely regard sin as a blemish and misfortune, which makes men and women objects of pity and compassion. It will see in sin the abominable thing which God hates, the thing which makes man guilty and lost in his Maker’s sight, the thing which deserves God’s wrath and condemnation. It will look on sin as the cause of all sorrow and unhappiness, of strife and wars, of quarrels and contentions, of sickness and death,-the blight which has blighted God’s fair creation, the cursed thing which makes the whole earth groan and travail in pain. Above all, it will

see in sin the thing which will ruin us eternally, except we can find a ransom, - lead us captive, except we can get its chains broken, - and destroy our happiness, both here and hereafter, except we fight against it, even unto death. Is this your religion? Are these your feelings about sin? If not, you may well doubt whether your religion is *real*.”<sup>(23)</sup>

Notice in Ryle’s comments that he insists that sin is culpable, not merely pitiable,; that it affects human relationships at every level: that it has affected the natural order; and above all else that it has brought us into ruin, both now and eternally. (We will deal with that ruin in our comments on Ryle’s Eschatology, at a later stage.)

## **5 CONCLUSION**

In this study on Ryle’s view of sin, we have, in keeping with our overall purpose, emphasised his theological perspective, but we are again challenged by his evangelistic and pastoral concern, and the telling clarity and power with which he expresses his evangelical views.

## Part 4 The Doctrine of the Person of Christ

### Chapter 13

#### THE PERSON OF CHRIST

“The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man...”

(Thirty-nine Articles of Religion: Article 11)

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

As we would anticipate, Ryle's doctrine of the Person of Christ is entirely orthodox, even traditional, and we will look in vain for any new brilliant insights into, for example, the relation of the divine and human natures, or the effects of the “kenosis.” In this study, we shall follow the usual development of the doctrine, considering the Deity and Humanity of Christ, the Incarnation, and the Hypostatic Union.

#### 2 THE DEITY OF CHRIST

##### 2.1 The Importance of the Deity of Christ

For Bishop Ryle, this was a doctrine of supreme importance. Commenting on Mark 1:1 - “Jesus Christ the Son of God” - he writes:

“These words...were nothing less than an assertion of our Lord's divinity. They were a declaration that Jesus was Himself very God, and “equal with God” (John v.18). There is a beautiful fitness in

placing this truth in the very beginning of a gospel. The divinity of Christ is the citadel and keep of Christianity...Let believers cling to this doctrine with jealous watchfulness. With it they stand upon a rock. Without it, they have nothing solid beneath their feet.”<sup>(1)</sup>

He goes on to explain why the doctrine is so important:

“Here lies the infinite value of the satisfaction He made upon the cross...That death was not the death of a mere man...but of one who is “over all, God blessed forever.” ”<sup>(2)</sup>

The bishop, however, is not only insistent on the importance of Christ’s deity when writing for “everyman”. He is equally decided in an address given at the 15th annual Diocesan Conference at Liverpool, in 1896, when he was in his eightieth year. The old champion, facing the new views on “comprehension” within the Church of England, states emphatically: “if...a man calling himself a Churchman deliberately denies the doctrine of the Trinity, or *the proper deity of Christ*...I cannot understand what he is doing in our ranks.”<sup>(3)</sup> And of course he is absolutely right. To be sure, acceptance of the deity of Christ is a matter of faith, but to profess adherence to a denomination as one of its ministers and at the same time deny one of the basic tenets of its confession is an unconscionable act, and a plain man like Bishop Ryle simply could not abide such practice.

## **2.2 The Exposition of the Deity of Christ**

In his exposition of the Deity of Christ, Ryle, while clearly subscribing to entirely orthodox concepts, also, in the most emphatic terms, reminds us of the

need for reverential awe before the great mystery of “God manifest in the flesh.” In his exposition of John 5:16-23, he combines this orthodoxy and reverential awe, and his comments are worthy of notice.

“These verses begin one of the most deep and solemn passages in the four Gospels. They show us the Lord Jesus asserting His own Divine nature, his unity with God the Father, and the high dignity of His office. Nowhere does our Lord dwell so fully on these subjects as in the chapter before us. And nowhere, we must confess, do we find out so thoroughly the weakness of man’s understanding! There is much, we must all feel, that is far beyond our comprehension in our Lord’s account of Himself...How often men say that they want clear explanations of such doctrines as the Trinity. Yet here we have our Lord handling the subject of His own Person, and behold! we cannot follow Him. We seem only to touch His meaning with the tip of our fingers...In reading His words, we must all feel that we are reading mysterious things, and treading on very holy ground. He asserts His own unity with God the Father. No other reasonable meaning can be put on the expressions, - “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. - “The Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth.” Such language, however deep and high, appears to mean that in operation, and knowledge, and heart, and will, the Father and the son are One, - two persons, but One God. Truths such as these are

of course beyond man's power to explain particularly. Enough for us to believe and rest upon them."<sup>(4)</sup>

Similarly, in a footnote to the same passage, Ryle comments: " "I want more light", says proud man. God gives him his desire in this chapter, and lifts up the veil a little. But behold! we are dazzled by the very light we wanted, and we find we have not eyes to take it in."<sup>(5)</sup> A further footnote expounds the text in terms of the unity within the Godhead, thus:

"This opening verse [of the paragraph] declares the complete unity there is between God the Father and God the Son. The Son, from His very nature and relation to the Father, "can do nothing" independently or separately from the Father. It is not that He lacks or *wants* the power to do, but that He *will* not do. (Compare Gen.xix.22)...''Of Himself'' does not mean without help, or unassisted, but "from himself", from His own independent will. He can only do such things as, from His unity with the Father, and consequent ineffable knowledge, He "seeth" the Father doing. For the Father and the Son are so united, - one God though two persons, - that whatsoever the Father does the Son does also."<sup>(6)</sup>

There follow, as part of the same footnote, comments to the same effect, from Augustine and Hilary among the Fathers, and Barnes and Diodati of more recent date. Exigencies of space preclude us from giving these sources in full, but they indicate Ryle's ability to pick up the appositeness of comment in the works he consulted, and are, incidentally, an indication of his scholarship,

even though it rested lightly on his shoulders in his popular exposition of the truth.

At this point, we ask indulgence in quoting the bishop at length again, because Ryle's treatment of the following verse, (John 5:20) is evidence, not only of his orthodoxy and piety, but also of his ability to argue theologically. This last point is important in view of the allegation that he was no theologian.<sup>(7)</sup>

Ryle's comments are as follows:

“This verse carries on the thought begun in the preceding verse, - the unity of the Father and the Son. When we read the words, “the Father loveth” and the “Father showeth”, we must not for a moment suppose them to imply any superiority in the Father, or any inferiority in the Son, as to their Divine nature and essence. - The “love” is not the love of an earthly parent to a beloved child. The “showing” is not the showing of a teacher to an ignorant scholar. The “love” is meant to show us that unspeakable unity of heart and affection (if such words may be reverently used) which eternally existed and exists between the Father and the Son. The “showing” means that entire confidence and co-operation which there was between the Father and the Son as to all the works which the Son should do when He came into the world to fill the office of Mediator, and to save sinners...Both in this, and the preceding verse, we must carefully remember the utter inability of any human language, or human ideas, to express perfectly such matters as our Lord is speaking of. Language is intended specially to express the

things of man. It fails greatly when used to express things about God...We must remember that [the expressions studied above] are intended to explain the relation between two divine Beings, who are one in essence, though two persons, - one in mind and will, though two in manifestation, - equal in all things as touching the Godhead, though the Son is inferior to the Father as touching His manhood. There must needs be immense difficulty in finding words to convey any idea of the relation between these two Persons. Hence the language used by our Lord must be cautiously handled, with a constant recollection that we are not reading of an earthly father and son, but of God the Father and God the Son, who though one in essence as God, are at the same time two distinct Persons.”<sup>(8)</sup>

Our consideration of Ryle’s treatment of this aspect of the Person of Christ concludes with a quotation from a footnote to his exposition of John 1:1, and in particular the clause, “the Word was God”.

“The whole verse, honestly and impartially interpreted, is an unanswerable argument against three classes of heretics. It confutes the Arians, who regard Christ as a Being inferior to God. - It confutes the Sabellians, who deny any distinction of Persons in the Trinity...above all it confutes the Socinians and Unitarians who say that Jesus Christ was not God but man, a most holy and perfect man, but only a man.”<sup>(9)</sup>



We believe that the excerpts from Bishop Ryle's writings on the Deity of Christ show him to be an orthodox and able teacher, and a reverent worshipping Christian.

### **3 THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST AND THE INCARNATION**

#### **3.1 The Doctrinal Expression**

On the subject of the real Humanity of Christ, we cannot do better than quote Ryle's comments on John 1:14:

“The plain meaning of these words is, that our divine Saviour really took human nature upon Him, in order to save sinners. He really became a man like ourselves in all things, sin only excepted. Like ourselves, he was born of a woman, though born in a miraculous manner. Like ourselves, He grew from infancy to boyhood, and from boyhood to man's estate, both in wisdom and stature (Luke ii.52.). Like ourselves, He hungered, thirsted, ate, drank, slept, was wearied, felt pain, wept, rejoiced, marvelled, was moved to anger and compassion. Having become flesh, and taken a body, He prayed, read the Scriptures, suffered being tempted, and submitted His human will to the will of God the Father. And finally, in the same body, He really suffered and shed His blood, really died, was really buried, really rose again, and really ascended up into heaven.”<sup>(10)</sup>

In this relatively short statement, we have an example of Ryle's gift for saying much in small compass. Not only is the bishop insisting on the true humanity

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of Christ, he is also showing that this humanity involved the Saviour's physical, intellectual, volitional and emotional life, and His responsibility, as the Mediator, to be obedient unto death. It is a doctrinal exposition expressed simply, and yet without the loss of the essentials of dogma. But the bishop has more for us.

### **3.2 The Practical Application**

Not only doctrine, but also practical usefulness are drawn from the text. Apart from Christ's manhood being a means to priestly sympathy, Ryle sees in Jesus' humanity two other great practical lessons. He expresses them thus:

“Did the Word become flesh? Then He can supply us with a perfect pattern and example for our daily life. Had He walked among us as an angel or a spirit, we could never have copied Him. But having dwelt among us as a man, we know that the true standard of holiness is “to walk even as He walked.” (1 John ii.6). He is a perfect pattern, because He is God. But He is also a pattern exactly suited to our wants, because He is man... ...did the Word become flesh? Then let us see in our mortal bodies a real, true dignity, and not defile them by sin. Vile and weak as our body may seem, it is a body which the Eternal Son of God was not ashamed to take upon Himself, and to take up to heaven. That simple fact is a pledge that He will raise our bodies at the last day, and glorify them together with His own.”<sup>(11)</sup>

## **4 THE EVERLASTING MANHOOD AND IMPECCABILITY OF CHRIST**

As the study of Historical Theology shows us, the doctrine of the Incarnation is a veritable “minefield,” and Ryle is careful, in his footnotes to the above exposition, to insist on the permanence of Christ’s human nature since the Incarnation, - “from that hour He has never ceased to be man.”<sup>(12)</sup> With equal firmness he insists on the impeccability of Christ’s human nature, - “...He was made in “the likeness of sinful flesh”...but we must not go beyond this. Christ was “made sin for us”...But “He knew no sin,” and was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and without taint of corruption...Christ was “void from sin, both in His flesh and in His spirit” ”<sup>(13)</sup>

## **5 THE HYPOSTATIC UNION**

### **5.1 The Mystery in the Doctrine**

Bishop Ryle is very clear on the difficulty of comprehending this great article of the Christian faith. As he puts it: “This union of two natures in Christ’s one Person is doubtless one of the greatest mysteries of the Christian religion.”<sup>(14)</sup> And again, “There is unquestionably much about this union...which we cannot explain, and must be content to believe.”<sup>(15)</sup>

### **5.2 The Exposition of the Doctrine**

But the mystery must not stand in the way of reverent exposition, nor the refutation of heretical views. The bishop expresses the matter this way: “While we state most carefully what we do believe, we must not shrink from declaring boldly what we do not believe.”<sup>(16)</sup> With what clarity he did this, we may judge from his exposition of the doctrine, based upon John 1:14:

“We must never forget, that although our Lord was God and man at the same time, the divine and human natures in Him were never confounded. One nature did not swallow up the other. The two natures remained perfect and distinct. The divinity of Christ was never for a moment laid aside, although veiled. The manhood of Christ, during His life-time, was never for a moment unlike our own, though by union with the Godhead, greatly dignified. Though perfect God, Christ has always been perfect man from the first moment of His incarnation... Though perfect man, Christ never ceased to be perfect God. He that suffered for sin on the cross, and was made sin for us, was “God manifest in the flesh.”...Though He became “flesh” in the fullest sense, when He was born of the Virgin Mary, He never at any period ceased to be the Eternal Word. To say that He constantly manifested His Divine nature during His earthly ministry, would, of course, be contrary to plain facts. To attempt to explain why His Godhead was sometimes veiled and at other times unveiled, while He was on earth, would be venturing on ground which we had better leave alone. But to say that at any instant of His earthly ministry He was not fully and entirely God, is nothing less than heresy.”<sup>(17)</sup>

### **5.3 The Importance of the Doctrine**

Bishop Ryle would never accept that a correct understanding of the union of the two natures is unimportant, or that precise language and careful definition is merely “hairsplitting.” On the contrary, this truth is “exactly that which

gives infinite value to His mediation, and qualifies Him to be the very Mediator that sinners need.”<sup>(18)</sup> As the bishop shows, there is hardly an area of our Saviour’s work that is not affected by this reality of the union of the two natures.

“It is the same union which gives infinite value to His righteousness, when imputed to believers. It is the righteousness of One who was God as well as man. - It is the same union which gives infinite value to the atoning blood which He shed for sinners on the cross. It is the blood of One who was God as well as man. - It is the same union which gives infinite value to His resurrection... - Let these things sink deeply into our hearts.”<sup>(19)</sup>

Incidentally, as to the theological and polemical significance of John 1:14, Ryle, in a footnote, quoting Arrowsmith, a 17th Century Puritan divine, claims that the text in question refutes Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, and Eutychianism!<sup>(20)</sup>

## **6 THE VIRGIN BIRTH**

In reviewing this material one notes a surprising omission in Ryle’s treatment of the doctrine - the subject of the Virgin Birth. Of course, the bishop accepted the literal truth of the doctrine, but in his comments on Matthew 1 and Luke 1 he confines himself to the following comment on Luke 1:35:

“We shall do well to follow the example of the angel in all our reflections on this deep subject. Let us ever regard it with holy reverence, and abstain from those unseemly and unprofitable

speculations upon it, in which some have unhappily indulged. Enough for us to know that “the Word was made flesh,” and that when the Son of God came into the world, a real “body was prepared for Him,” so that He “took part of our flesh and blood,” and was “made of a woman.” (John i.14; Heb.x.5; Heb.ii.14; Gal.iv.4.) Here we must stop. The manner in which all this was effected is wisely hidden from us...In a religion which really comes down from heaven there must needs be mysteries. Of such mysteries in Christianity, the incarnation is one.”<sup>(21)</sup>

## **7 THE “KENOSIS” THEORY**

As we come to the end of this chapter, we glance at one of the theological issues of the 19th Century that bears strongly on the subject of the incarnation - the “kenosis” theory. From its beginnings in Germany, the awareness of it spread to England, and Ryle was not unaware of its implications. He alludes to it not so much because of its relation to the nature of the incarnation, but as it might have affected Christ’s omniscience, in the matter of the authority of the Old Testament. Thus we find him, as Bishop of Liverpool, addressing the diocese on the subject of the authority of the Old Testament, and in particular of the book of Genesis:

“When I read that our Lord Jesus Christ is “One with the Father,” that in Him are hidden “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” that He is “the Light of the world,” my mind cannot conceive the possibility of His being ignorant, as latter-day theories about Genesis certainly imply, however fully I admit the “Kenosis”

of His Incarnation. That blessed Saviour to whom I am taught to commit my soul, in the very week that He died for my redemption, spoke of the Flood and the days of Noah as realities! If He spoke *ignorantly* with Calvary in full view, it would shake to the foundation my confidence in His power to save me, and would destroy my peace. I abhor the idea of an ignorant Saviour!”<sup>(22)</sup>

One could have wished that such a major issue, which affected orthodoxy so sharply, had been handled more thoroughly, and less cavalierly, by the great evangelical champion. This near-vacuum was of course filled by Bishop Gore and others to the great disadvantage of the evangelicals and those Anglo-Catholics who were more conservative than Gore.

## **8 CONCLUSION**

Ryle’s understanding and handling of the subject of the Person of Christ, the very heart of the faith, confirms our strong impression of him as an evangelical pastor, concerned for orthodoxy, and pastoral and applicatory in his ministry.

## Part 5 The Doctrine of the Work of Christ

### Chapter 14

#### THE OFFICES OF CHRIST:

##### (1) THE PROPHET

“How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet? Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.”

(Westminster Shorter Catechism: Q.& A.24)

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

As far as the writer is aware, Bishop Ryle never formally dealt with the subject of the Offices of Christ in the traditional framework, common to Reformed theologians, of Prophet, Priest and King, and while he certainly did subscribe to the concept,<sup>(1)</sup> his emphasis was on the priestly ministry of Christ. As he himself says, in his comment on Luke 4:14-22:

“Let us take care that we know for ourselves in what light we ought chiefly to regard Christ. It is right and good to reverence Him as very God. It is well to know Him as Head over all things - the mighty Prophet - the Judge of all - the King of kings. But we must not rest here, if we hope to be saved. We must know Jesus as the Friend of the poor in spirit, the Physician of the diseased heart, the deliverer of the soul in bondage. These are the principal offices He came on earth to fulfil.”<sup>(2)</sup>



This is in many ways a pity, not least because it betrays in Ryle a failure common to many evangelicals of his day, and ours, of emphasising the redemptive elements in the faith at the expense of the Didactic truths, so necessary to a full-orbed Christianity.

However, it is possible, albeit somewhat artificially, to construct, from Ryle's writings generally, a picture of his view of these three aspects of Christ's ministry. In this chapter, we devote our attention to the concept of Christ as prophet.

## **2 CHRIST AS PROPHET AND THE RATIFICATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Insofar as Ryle defends the authority of Christ in the matter of our Lord's ratification of the Old Testament scriptures, the bishop is indeed accepting the finality of Christ's prophetic office. That he does make such a defence is clear from his comments in various official addresses as Bishop of Liverpool. The following is an example:

“Let us turn next to our Lord Jesus Christ, and consider how the theories of Higher Criticism must affect our estimate of His Person and infallibility. They appear to me to land us unavoidably in a most painful and difficult position. Most of us have been taught to believe that we have a Divine Saviour of perfect knowledge, and incapable of saying what was not true, or making any mistake. We have thought Him not only a perfect Redeemer, but a perfect Prophet and Teacher. But we are now asked to believe that He sometimes spoke of persons as real persons who never existed, and events as real

historical events which never took place. In short we are invited to believe that Jesus Christ, when He was on earth, was a Person of *limited knowledge*. This is a theory which I must decline to accept, and must regard as dangerous in the extreme.”<sup>(3)</sup>

### **3 CHRIST AS PROPHET AND HIS ESCHATOLOGICAL PRONOUNCEMENTS**

Further, the bishop imputes final authority to the words of Jesus eschatologically, as in his footnote to his exposition of John 12:48. The words under consideration are “..the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” Ryle expounds:

“Our Lord here declares that the things he publicly preached to the Jews while He was upon earth would witness finally against those who did not believe, at the last day, and be their condemnation.....The witness of Christ’s words will be unanswerable, and in consequence of that witness they will be condemned.”<sup>(4)</sup>

Again, commenting on Christ’s prophetic words in Matthew 24, and in particular our Lord’s claim: “heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matt.24:35), Ryle comments: “He (Christ) tells us that, whatever man may say or think, His words shall be fulfilled in their season, and shall not “pass away” unaccomplished.”<sup>(5)</sup>

### **4 CHRIST AS PROPHET AND HIS UNION WITH THE FATHER**

Discussing Christ’s claims for His teaching, the bishop, in effect, is upholding Christ’s ministry as the anointed Prophet, but relates Christ’s final authority as

a teacher to His union with the Father, rather than merely to the Anointing. This is clear from his comments on John 3:34, on the words, “God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him”. These words are themselves spoken in the context of Christ speaking the words of God, and therefore Ryle’s comments, given below, are particularly instructive. While he does accept that the text shows, *inter alia*, that “Jesus of Nazareth was anointed with the Holy Ghost, and fitted for His office as our Priest, and Prophet, and King, in a way and degree never granted to any other man”<sup>(6)</sup>, Ryle insists that there is more, for he continues:

“All this is undoubtedly true, but it is not, in my opinion, the whole truth of the sentence. I believe that John the Baptist points not only to our Lord’s human nature but to His divinity. I believe his meaning to be, “He whom God hath sent, is One far above prophets and ministers, to whom the Spirit is only given by measure. He is One who is Himself very God. In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He is One who, as a Person in the Trinity, is eternally and ineffably united with God the Holy Spirit.....He has the Spirit without measure, because in the divine essence, He and the Spirit, and the Father, are One, and undivided.” ”<sup>(7)</sup>

## **5 RYLE’S RELUCTANCE TO DEVELOP THE “ANOINTED PROPHET” CONCEPT**

Ryle justifies his interpretation by reference to the context of John 3:35, but Ryle’s proclivity for emphasising the union of the Son with the Father seems to the writer to be indicative of the bishop’s nervous hyper-orthodoxy that

seems fearful of straying far from Chalcedon and the Athanasian Creed, in a day when the German “kenosis” theory had become a monster to the evangelicals as merely a mask for Arianism. The concept of Divine anointing as the basis for Christ’s authoritative teaching, might have opened up vistas of subordinationism that were too painful for Ryle to view. Admittedly, this is speculative, but given the theological background, and Ryle’s admitted suspicion of “the leaven of the Sadducees” spreading not openly but insidiously,<sup>(8)</sup> it is suggested that it explains Ryle’s apparent reluctance to develop the model of Christ as the Prophet.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

As to Christ as the Priest, the bishop was far more eloquent, and to that aspect of the Offices of Christ we must now turn.

## Part 5 The Doctrine of the Work of Christ

### Chapters 15-16 THE OFFICES OF CHRIST: (2) THE PRIEST

#### Chapter 15

### THE IMPORTANCE AND NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT

"...one Christ, very God, and very Man; who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men."

(The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion: Article II)

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

##### 1.1 The Contemporary Religious Background

In expounding this theme of the priestly work of Christ, we must realize that Bishop Ryle was interested in this subject not merely because it proclaimed Christ as Saviour, but also because it was a great doctrinal antidote to the sacerdotalism that was coming back into the Established Church through the influence of the "Ritualists" of the nineteenth century. This movement was regarded with horror by consistent evangelicals, as it was seen as being totally subversive of the protestant character of the Church of England.<sup>(1)</sup> Among other things the "Ritualists" introduced Sacramental Confession and the concept of the minister as a sacrificing priest. It is against this background, first of all, that Ryle's treatment of the priestly ministry must be seen. Further, in place of the clear and unequivocal statements of the church's doctrinal standards regarding the atonement, there were not lacking churchmen of the

liberal school who were reducing Christ's atonement to an example of self-sacrifice, and denying its propitiatory character.<sup>(2)</sup> Once again, Ryle was facing enemies on two fronts, and his exposition of Christ as priest is not untouched by the effects of these conflicts. With this background material in mind, we proceed to the exposition itself.

## 1.2 The Centrality of the Mediatorial Ministry of Christ

J.C. Ryle, as an evangelical, laid great stress on the necessity for Christ's mediatorial work. He expressed this in the clearest possible terms in his introductory paper to '*Knots Untied*':

"The third leading feature of Evangelical Religion is the *paramount importance it attaches to the work and office of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and to the nature of the salvation which He has wrought out for man. Its theory is that the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ, has by His life, death, and resurrection, as our Representative and Substitute, obtained a complete salvation for sinners, and a redemption from the guilt, power, and consequences of sin."<sup>(3)</sup>

We may note two particular truths germane to our exposition in this quotation; first the expression "Representative and Substitute" in which Ryle testifies to the character of the atonement, against the more liberal view; and secondly, the phrase "a complete salvation for sinners" as against the idea that we may add something to His work by virtue of our own merit, whether this is expressed in "law-works", or ecclesiastically. As Ryle says, in the same

paper, “..people ought to be continually warned not to make a Christ of the Church, or of the ministry, or of the forms of worship, or of baptism, or of the Lord’s Supper.’’(4)

### **1.3 The Discussion of the Priestly Ministry in this Thesis**

The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks the question: “How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?”, and gives the answer: “Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and to reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us.’’(5)

We will follow this traditional division of the priestly work of Christ, focussing first on His atonement, and then on His intercessory ministry.

### **1.4 Christ’s Humanity and His Priestly Ministry**

However, by way of theological preface to these dominant features of Christ’s priestly office, we will consider Ryle’s understanding of the relationship of Christ’s real humanity to His mediatorial work, in respect of His fitness to sympathise with His people, to be what the writer to the Hebrews calls “a high priest..touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb.4:15). Ryle comments: “Did the Word become flesh? Then He is One who can be touched with the feeling of His people’s infirmities, because He has suffered Himself, being tempted. He is almighty because He is God, and yet He can feel with us, because he is man.” On the same theme, but at greater length, commenting on the words in John 4:6, “Jesus, therefore, being wearied with His journey..”, the bishop expounds with his usual eloquence:

“When “the Word became flesh,” He took on Him a nature like our own in all things, sin only excepted. Like ourselves, He grew from infancy to youth, and from youth to man’s estate. Like ourselves, He hungered, thirsted, felt pain, and needed sleep. He was liable to every sinless infirmity to which we are liable. in all things His body was framed like our own. The truth before us is full of comfort for all who are true Christians. He to whom sinners are bid to come for pardon and peace, is one who is man as well as God. He had a real human nature when He was upon earth. He took a real human nature with Him, when He ascended up into heaven. We have at the right hand of God a High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, because He has suffered Himself being tempted. When we cry to Him in the hour of bodily pain and weakness, He knows well what we mean. When our prayers and praises are feeble through bodily weariness, He can understand our condition. He knows our frame. He has learned by experience what it is to be a man....The man Christ Jesus can enter fully into everything that belongs to man’s condition. The poor, the sick, and the suffering, have in heaven One who is not only an almighty Saviour, but a most feeling Friend.”<sup>(7)</sup>

## **2 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ATONEMENT**

We may now consider Bishop Ryle’s view of our High Priest’s sacrifice. Truly, here is a plethora of material! The bishop is ever a lover of the Cross! His papers, sermons, expositions, and even his historical works, dwell on



Christ crucified in a truly apostolic manner. Like the apostle, he *gloried* in the cross. (Gal.6:14.) We look now at different facets of his exposition of this central truth. In his paper, “The Cross of Christ” in “*Old Paths*”,<sup>(8)</sup> Ryle devotes almost the whole of the paper to stressing why Christians should see the cross as that in which the apostle gloried, and both why and how they should glory in it too!

The following excerpts will show us the depth of the staunch evangelical’s feelings on the subject.

“I wish to say something about “the cross” to the readers of this volume. Believe me, the subject is one of the deepest importance. This is no mere question of controversy. it is not one of those points on which men may agree to differ, and feel that differences will not shut them out of heaven. A man must be right on this subject, or he is lost for ever. Heaven or hell, happiness or misery, life or death, blessing or cursing in the last day,-all hinges on the answer to this question: “What do You think about the cross of Christ?”<sup>(9)</sup>

So the cross is a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith, and indispensable. But it has importance for other reasons as well.

## **2.1 The Prominence of the Cross in the Gospels**

Firstly, its importance is shown in the fact of its prominence in the gospels.

As Ryle says:

“It is not for nothing that the crucifixion is described four times over in the New Testament. There are very few things that all four

writers of the Gospel describe. Generally speaking, if Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell a thing in our Lord's history, John does not tell it. But there is one thing that all the four give us most fully, and that one thing is the story of the cross. This is a telling fact, and not to be overlooked."<sup>(10)</sup>

## **2.2 Facts about the Cross that Show its Importance**

Further, there are three objective truths about the cross that emphasise its importance for Ryle. We will, as usual, permit him to tell us in his own words:

“People seem to me to forget that all Christ's sufferings were *fore-ordained*. They did not come on Him by chance or accident: they were all planned, counselled and determined from all eternity. The cross was foreseen in all the provisions of the everlasting Trinity for the salvation of sinners....Not one throb of pain did Jesus feel, not one precious drop of blood did Jesus shed, which had not been appointed long ago. Infinite wisdom planned that redemption should be by the cross. Infinite wisdom brought Jesus to the cross in due time.

People seem to me to forget that all Christ's sufferings on the cross *were necessary for man's salvation*. he had to bear our sins, if ever they were to be borne at all. This..the one payment of our debt that God would accept: this was the great sacrifice on which our eternal life depended. If Christ had not gone to the cross and suffered in our stead, the just for the unjust, there would not have been a spark of

hope for us. People seem to me to forget that all Christ's sufferings were endured *voluntarily*, and of His own free will. He was under no compulsion. Of His own choice He laid down His life: of His own choice He went to the cross in order to finish the work He came to do. He might easily have summoned legions of angels with a word, and scattered Pilate and Herod, and all their armies, like chaff before the wind. But He was a willing sufferer. His heart was set on the salvation of sinners. He was resolved to open "a fountain for all sin and uncleanness," by shedding His own blood."<sup>(11)</sup>

The eternal Divine purpose in the cross, the absolute necessity for it if we were to be saved, and the devoted willingness of the Crucified to bear our sin, all make the Cross the vital heart of our faith, so that Ryle, responding as it were to these glorious truths, affirms: "The longer I dwell on the cross in my thoughts, the more I am satisfied that there is more to be learned at the foot of the cross than anywhere else in the world."<sup>(12)</sup>

### **2.3 Lessons from the Cross that Demonstrate its Importance**

Ryle then derives his doctrine of the supreme importance of the cross from the great lessons it teaches. He continues:

"Would I know the length and breadth of *God the Father's love* towards a sinful world? Where shall I see it most displayed?...I look at the cross of Christ. I see in it not the cause of the Father's love, but the effect. There I see that God so loved this wicked world, that He gave His only begotten Son,-gave Him to suffer and die, - that  
"whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal

life.”...I know that the Father loves us, because He did not withhold from us his Son, His only Son....

Would I know how exceedingly *sinful and abominable sin is* in the sight of God? Where shall I see that most fully brought out? Shall I turn to the history of the flood, and read how sin drowned the world? Shall I go to the shore of the Dead Sea, and mark what sin brought on Sodom and Gomorrah?....No: I can find a clearer proof still! I look at the cross of Christ. There I see that sin is so black and damnable, that nothing but the blood of God’s own Son can wash it away. There I see that sin has so separated me from my holy Maker, that all the angels in heaven could never have made peace between us. Nothing could reconcile us, short of the death of Christ....

Would I know the *fulness and completeness of the salvation* God has provided for sinners? Where shall I see it most distinctly? Shall I go to the general declarations in the Bible about God’s mercy? Shall I rest in the general truth that God is a “God of love”? Oh, no! I will look at the cross of Christ! I find no evidence like that. I find no balm for a sore conscience and a troubled heart, like the sight of Jesus dying for me on the accursed tree.....The curse of that law which I have broken has come down on One who there suffered in my stead. Payment has been made for me, even to the uttermost farthing.....”(13)

Ryle lists a further three lessons, viz., reasons for being a holy man, learning to be contented and cheerful under all the cares and anxieties of life, and

assurance of final perseverance, which are to be drawn from our contemplation of the cross<sup>(14)</sup>, but exigencies of space preclude quotation.

## **2.4 Other Factors Showing the Importance of the Cross**

The bishop's final series of arguments for stressing the Cross in the Christian life are an assortment of considerations, unrelated in themselves, but of cumulative importance. We list them, without, except in one instance, expounding them. First, the uniqueness that the Cross gives to Christianity as a religion. Second, the message of the cross as the real strength of a minister, and his uselessness without it. Similarly, it is the message of the cross that makes missionary effort effective. Again, the cross is the foundation of the church's prosperity.<sup>(15)</sup> Finally, and here we quote at length, because of its relevance for our ecumenical age:

“The cross is *the grand centre of union* among true Christians. Our outward differences are many, without doubt. One man is an Episcopalian, another is a Presbyterian, - one is an Independent, another a Baptist, - one is a Calvinist, another an Arminian, - one is a Lutheran, another a Plymouth Brother, - one is a friend to Establishments, another a friend to the voluntary system, - one is a friend to liturgies, another a friend to extempore prayer. But, after all, what shall we hear about most of these differences, in heaven? Nothing, most probably: nothing at all. *Does a man really and sincerely glory in the cross of Christ?* That is the grand question. If he does, he is my brother: we are travelling on the same road; we are journeying towards a home where Christ is all, and everything

outward in religion will be forgotten. But if he does not glory in the cross of Christ, I cannot feel comfort about him. Union on outward points only is union only for a time: union about the cross is union for eternity. Error on outward points is only a skin-deep disease: error about the cross is a disease at the heart. Union about outward points is a mere man-made union: union about the cross of Christ can only be produced by the Holy Ghost.’’(16)

Ryle’s position is, of course, the classically evangelical position. Union is desirable, but not at the expense of essential truth, and particularly the truth of the heart of the gospel.

We have examined Ryle’s position on the centrality of the doctrine of the atonement. Now we move on.

### **3 THE NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT**

#### **3.1 Unorthodox Views of the Atonement**

The nineteenth century saw the resurgence of theories of the atonement akin to the “Moral Influence” Theory of Abelard, notably the view promulgated by J. McLeod Campbell in 1856, described by Louis Berkhof as “the theory of vicarious repentance’’(17), or “the theory of sympathy and identification’’(18). Campbell’s view is important for this study because of its reception in the nineteenth century theological world. According to Latourette, the book “was regarded by some friendly critics as the greatest work in theology in English in the first six decades of the century.’’(19)

Perhaps even more influential, in that it stirred up a veritable “hornet’s nest”

in theological and religious circles in England, was the work of J.F.D.Maurice. According to Latourette, in Maurice's teaching was a radical departure from classical views of the subject. We quote at length:

“The atonement (according to Maurice) is not the offering of a vicarious sacrifice of the innocent for the guilty to satisfy the requirements of a just God, but the fulfillment of the law of righteousness by sharing the sufferings of mankind, of which Christ is the head, and by the perfect obedience of the Son of God whose will is one with the Father's.....All that men need do to be reconciled is to recognize their sonship, repent, and give God the love which is the natural relation of a son to the Father.”<sup>(20)</sup>

### **3.2 Ryle's Repudiation of the “New” Views on the Atonement**

#### **3.2.1 The Totality of the Repudiation**

It is against this background that we examine Ryle's views on the nature of the atonement. On the negative side, we find a total rejection of the “modern” theories of the atonement. In his Fourth Triennial Charge to the Diocese of Liverpool, in 1890, the old evangelical warrior devotes a whole division of his “Charge” to the subject. We quote him *in extenso* so that we may capture something of his strong feelings on the subject:

“In the next place, let me charge you *to hold fast the great foundation-principle of Scripture and our Church, that forgiveness of sins is only given to man through the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross.* This is a deep and solemn subject; but there is such an

immense amount of strange doctrine floating in the air about it, that I dare not pass it over. It seems to me to lie so near the roots of the Gospel, that it is my duty not to be silent.

So far as I can understand - and I am not sure that I do - the theory of many appears to be that it is the incarnation rather than the sacrifice - the human nature that Christ took on Him rather than the death He died -which is intended to be the chief ground of hope for our souls. It seems to be held that the blood which "cleanseth from all sin" is not so much the life-blood which Christ shed when He died, as the blood of human nature of which He became partaker when He was born into the world, and by partaking ennobled all Adam's race, and made salvation possible for fallen man."<sup>(21)</sup>

(At this point it seems that Ryle may have in view Westcott's theory regarding the blood of Christ, and it is therefore necessary to explain that Westcott taught that in the writings of John, "blood" "is the symbol of the natural life (comp.i.13); and so especially of life as sacrificed; and Christ by dying provided for the communication of the virtue of His human life:"<sup>(22)</sup>)

To continue with Ryle's comments:

"As to the old doctrine that the blood which flowed on Calvary was the ransom paid for our souls and the price of our redemption from the punishment due to our sins, it seems to be thrown aside by many like an obsolete dogma, unworthy of these latter days. Some even sneer at it as 'blood theology', and tell us that Christ's death was



only the death of a great martyr, and a grand example of perfect submission to God's will, but not a propitiation for sin. Now I know not what some of you may think of the theory I have tried to delineate; but I must plainly say that I cannot for a moment admit that it is true, and will bear the test of calm examination. The subject is one about which I dare not call any one master."<sup>(23)</sup>

### 3.2.2 The Arguments for the Repudiation

The bishop's refutation of the doctrinal innovations he has described is based on four arguments, as follows:

“(1) I cannot reconcile the theory with scores of *plain texts in the New Testament*, in which the forgiveness of sins, salvation, justification, reconciliation, redemption, deliverance from wrath to come, and peace with God, appear to be inseparably connected with the sufferings and death of Christ, and not with His life....When the saints in Revelation are shown to us in vision as singing a new song before the throne, the theme of it was, ‘Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood.’ (Rev.5.9.)

(2) I cannot reconcile the theory with the uniform language of our *authorised formularies* on the subject of Christ's death. The Te Deum, the Litany, the Office for the Visitation of the Sick, the Communion Service, all contain expressions about the precious blood and death, which point to our Lord's vicarious sufferings on Calvary as the object on which Christians should especially look in

all their thoughts when they look to Him for salvation. Redemption by death appears to my eyes to turn up everywhere....

(3) I cannot reconcile the theory with the uniform teaching of the *Old Testament dispensation* about the way of access to God. The great principle which, like a red line, runs through the whole Mosaic ceremonial, is the absolute necessity of sacrifice. Day after day, all the year round, and especially at the Passover, the Jew was taught by emblems and figures that “without shedding of blood” there was no safety for the soul, and ‘no remission of sins.’ If the Mosaic system was meant to keep before the mind of Israel, by types and figures, the great future sacrifice of the Lamb of God on Calvary, and redemption by His blood, I can quite see its reasonableness. But if...not...the incessant slaughter of innocent animals on Jewish altars for fourteen hundred years appears to my eyes an unnecessary waste of animal life, inconsistent with God’s mercy to all His creatures, and admitting of no satisfactory explanation.

(4) Last, but not least, I cannot reconcile the theory with the unvarying language of our Prayer-book on the subject of the Lord’s Supper. In that holy ordinance, St.Paul tells us that we “show the Lord’s death till He come.”...His death, observe, not His life! ...The Communion Office in one place speaks of Christ’s “meritorious cross and passion, whereby alone we obtain remission of our sins.” In another it bids us give hearty thanks ‘for the redemption of the world by the death and passion of our Saviour Christ.’...If these

remarkable expressions do not point to the death of Christ rather than His life...as the object of faith and the one ground of man's hope for his soul, I do not know what Prayer-book words mean.”<sup>(24)</sup>

In the manner characteristic of his usual treatment of issues, the plain-spoken evangelical is insisting on straightforward evidence - the plain meaning of words, the general tenor of Scripture, the clear position of the church. He has no place for subtleties of exposition, particularly when they lead away from the well-trodden path of orthodoxy.

We may note at this point, a reference in one of his historical works, *“Christian Leaders of the last Century”* (recently republished as *“Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century”*). Writing of the “substance and subject-matter of their preaching”<sup>(25)</sup>, Ryle says:

“Furthermore, the reformers of the last century taught constantly that *Christ's death upon the cross was the only satisfaction for man's sin*; and that, when Christ died, he died as our substitute - “the just for the unjust.”...They never taught the modern doctrine that Christ's death was only a great example of self-sacrifice. They saw in it something far higher, greater, deeper than this. They saw in it the payment of man's mighty debt to God.”<sup>(26)</sup>

The point of this quotation is that in its original context, the statement is part of a section in which the bishop is seeking to trace the effectiveness of the evangelism of the eighteenth century revival to, inter alia, the message they preached. In that context, and for the instruction of his own age, Ryle points

out that they had no place for anything other than a fully evangelical understanding of the atonement.

That inadequate views of the atonement were regarded in a serious light by Ryle is apparent not only from the above quotations, but also from the fact that he invariably includes this aspect of doctrinal departure in his strictures on the same as recorded in "*Charges and Addresses.*"<sup>(27)</sup>)

### **3.3 Ryle's Positive Exposition of the Nature of the Atonement**

So much for the negative aspect of Ryle's doctrine of the nature of the atonement. The positive declarations he made are similarly straightforward. We look at a few comments in his '*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels.*'

#### **3.3.1 The Atonement is Redemptive**

Commenting on Mark 10:45 - "The Son of Man came..to give his life a ransom for many", Ryle says:

"This is one of those expressions which ought to be carefully treasured up in the minds of all true Christians. It is one of the texts which prove incontrovertibly the atoning character of Christ's death. That death was no common death, like the death of a martyr, or of other holy men. It was the public payment, by an Almighty Representative, of the debts of sinful man to a holy God. It was the ransom which a Divine Surety undertook to provide, in order to procure liberty for sinners, tied and bound by the chain of their sins.

By that death Jesus made a full and complete satisfaction for man's countless transgressions. When His blood flowed, it was the price of our souls."<sup>(28)</sup>

Here, Christ's atonement is, for Ryle, redemptive. It is an objective event, involving the payment of a ransom-price, by God, ("a Divine Surety") to God. It secures redemption from the penalty of sin, and liberty from its chains.

### **3.3.2 The Atonement is Piacular and Vicarious**

Again, in his discussion of John 1:29, and in particular in his footnote to the words "taketh away" he writes:

"The Greek word so rendered, is given in the marginal reading, "beareth". Both ideas are included. It means "taketh away by his expiatory death." The Lamb of God "beareth" the sin of the world by taking it upon Himself. He allowed our guilt to be laid upon Him, and carried it away like the scapegoat, so that there was none left. It is one of the many expressions which describe the great Scripture truth, that Christ's death was a vicarious sacrifice for sin. He became our substitute. He took upon Him our sin. He was made sin for us. Our sins were imputed to Him. He was made a curse for us."<sup>(29)</sup>

Ryle's use of "vicarious", "imputed", "substitute", all show his commitment to the piacular understanding of the atonement, and this outlook is maintained throughout his work in this area. We give one, last example, the bishop's exposition of Matthew 27:46, on the words "My God, My God, why

hast Thou forsaken Me?" After rejecting the idea that the cry was "wrung from our Lord by mere bodily pain"<sup>(30)</sup>, Ryle goes on:

"They (these words) were meant to express the real pressure on his soul of the enormous burden of a world's sins. They were meant to show how truly and literally He was our substitute, was made sin, and a curse for us, and endured God's righteous anger against a world's sin in His own person. At that awful moment, the iniquity of us all was laid upon Him to the uttermost. It pleased the Lord to bruise Him, and put Him to grief. (Isaiah liii.10.) He bore our sins. He carried our transgressions. Heavy must have been that burden, real and literal must have been our Lord's substitution for us, when He, the eternal Son of God, could speak of Himself as for a time "forsaken."

Let the expression sink down into our hearts, and not be forgotten. We can have no stronger proof of the sinfulness of sin, or of the vicarious nature of Christ's sufferings, than His cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is a cry that should stir us up to hate sin, and encourage us to trust in Christ."<sup>(31)</sup>

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

We have considered Ryle's doctrine on the importance and nature of the atonement. As usual, we find him thoroughly and uncompromisingly evangelical, and warmly pastoral. We now turn to look at what is, from a classically Reformed point of view, the most controversial part of the bishop's soteriology, his understanding of the extent of the atonement.

## Part 5 The Doctrine of the Work of Christ

### Chapters 15-17 THE OFFICES OF CHRIST: (2) THE PRIEST

## Chapter 16

### THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT

“Christ..truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.”  
(Thirty-nine Articles of Religion: Article 11)

“The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself...hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him.”  
(Westminster Confession: Chapter VIII, Section V)

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

##### 1.1 Reformed Theology and Amyraldianism

Since the seventeenth century, it has been standard Reformed teaching that Christ’s atonement is to be viewed as particular rather than general in its design and extent, in contrast with the Arminian view that teaches the universality of the atonement. This “restrictive” view is consistent with the dogma of sovereign election, just as the Arminian view is consonant with the idea of election based on Divine foresight. However, as is well-known, during the seventeenth century, due largely to the influence of Moise Amyraut, an apparently mediating position was developed, that did not deny sovereign election, but which taught an unlimited atonement, so that, in effect, “Grace is

seen as universal in the provision for salvation but as particular in the application of it.”<sup>(1)</sup>

## 1.2 Ryle and Calvinistic Amyraldianism

It seems clear that this was the position held by Bishop Ryle, although he does not share Amyraut’s modified view of the doctrine of election.<sup>(2)</sup> Before examining the bishop’s view, however, it needs to be pointed out that Ryle was in no way contravening the teaching of the 39 Articles, as that 16th Century document does not express itself on the atonement in such a way as to enforce the idea of particular redemption.<sup>(3)</sup> Further, within the Anglican Evangelicalism of the nineteenth century, Ryle’s position was not exceptional. Writing on the 19th Century evangelicals, D.S.Allister says of Ryle, “Like the great majority of Anglican evangelicals of the century Ryle was not fully Calvinistic, but preferred the idea of general redemption..”<sup>(4)</sup>

## 2 RYLE’S EXPOSITION OF THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT PRESENTED

Ryle’s treatment of the subject appears to be restricted to his comments on the gospel passages that relate to the issue. As we are concerned that there should be no misunderstanding of Ryle’s doctrine regarding the extent of the atonement, we shall quote him *in extenso* at each place where he expresses himself on the point. The scriptural passages that Ryle himself denotes as most germane to his discussion of the extent of the atonement are John 1:29, John 3:16, John 6:32 and John 10:15.<sup>(5)</sup> We shall first quote all the relevant comments, and then seek to analyse them, in order to obtain a full picture of the bishop’s thought. As these are the longest quotations from Ryle that we



shall be using in this whole thesis, we ask the reader to accept that the very lengthy quotations are absolutely necessary to establish the precise nuances of Ryle's theological perspective.

## 2.1 Ryle on John 1:29

“Christ is an almighty Saviour, and a Saviour for all mankind. He “taketh away the sin of the world.” He did not die for Jews only, but for the Gentile as well as the Jew. He did not suffer for a few persons only, but for all mankind. The payment that He made on the cross was more than enough to make satisfaction for the debts of all. The blood that He shed was precious enough to wash away the sins of all. His atonement on the cross was sufficient for all mankind, though efficient only to them that believe. The sin that He took up and bore on the cross was the sin of the whole world.”<sup>(6)</sup>

“[Of the world.] It is almost needless to say that there are two views of this expression. Some say, that it only means, that Christ takes away the sins of Gentiles as well as Jews, and that it does not mean the sin of any but the elect. Others say, that it really means that Christ “taketh away” the sin of all mankind, that is, that He made an atonement sufficient for all, and that all are *salvable*, though not all saved, in consequence of His death.

I decidedly prefer the latter of these two views. I hold as strongly as any one, that Christ's death is profitable to none but to the elect who believe on His name. But I dare not limit and pare down such expressions as the one before us. I dare not say that no atonement

has been made, in any sense, except for the elect. I believe it is possible to be more systematic than the bible in our statements. When I read that the wicked who are lost, “deny the Lord that bought them,” (2 Peter ii.1,) and that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself,” (2 Cor.v.19,) I dare not confine the intention of redemption to the saints alone. Christ is for every man. I am aware the objection is often made, that “if Christ taketh away the sin of the world, and yet the vast majority of men die in their sins and are lost, Christ’s work for many was wrought in vain.” I see no force in this objection. I think we might as well argue, that because sin came into the world and marred creation, creation was in vain. We are not talking of the works of men, but of the eternal Word, and we must be content to see much in His works that we do not entirely understand. Though multitudes are lost, I have no doubt the last day will prove that nothing that Christ did for them was in vain.

I rest in the view of the text, that in some ineffable and inscrutable way, the whole world’s sin was borne and atoned for by Christ. “He taketh away, or makes atonement for, the sin of all the men and women in the world.” I have no doubt, from Scripture, that the vast majority of “the world’s” inhabitants will be found at last to have received no benefit from Christ, and to have died in their sins. I repudiate the idea of universal salvation as a dangerous heresy, and utterly contrary to Scripture. But the lost will not prove to be lost

because Christ did nothing for them. He bore their sins. He carried their transgressions. He provided payment, but they would not put in their claim to any interest in it. He set the prison door open to all; but the majority would not come out and be free. In the work of the Father in election, and of the spirit (sic) in conversion, I see limitation in the Bible most clearly. But in the work of Christ I see no limitation. The atonement was made for all the world, though it is applied to and enjoyed by none but believers.- Christ's intercession is the peculiar privilege of His people. But Christ's atonement is a benefit which is offered freely and honestly to all mankind.

In saying all this I am fully aware that the word "world" is sometimes used in a qualified sense, and must be interpreted with some limitation. When it is said, "The world knew him not," (John i.10,) it cannot mean that not a single person in the world knew Him. But in the text before us I see no necessity for limitation. I see the whole mass of mankind's guilt brought together in one singular word, "the sin of the world", and that sin, I am told, Christ "taketh away". And I believe the true meaning to be, that the Lamb of God has made atonement sufficient for all mankind, though efficient unquestionably to none but believers.''(7)

## 2.2 Ryle on John 3:16

This text, while not dealing with the atonement per se, nevertheless impinges on the question of God's universal love and His provision for the whole world in Christ.

”...we must beware of narrow and contracted opinions. We must not hesitate to tell any sinner that God loves him. It is not true that God cares for none but his own elect, or that Christ is not offered to any but those who are ordained to eternal life. There is a “kindness and love” in God towards all mankind. It was in consequence of that love that Christ came into the world, and died upon the cross. Let us not be wise above that which is written, or more systematic in our statements than Scripture itself. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God is not willing that any should perish. God would have all men to be saved. God loves the world. (John vi.32; Titus iii.4; I John iv.10; 2 Peter iii.9; I Tim.ii.4; Ezek.xxxiii.11.)<sup>(8)</sup> “[That he gave his only begotten Son]...The expression “he gave,” is a remarkable one. Christ is God the Father's gift to a lost and sinful world. He was given generally to be the Saviour, the Redeemer, the Friend of sinners, - to make an atonement sufficient for all, -and to provide a redemption large enough for all....He Himself says to the wicked Jews, “My Father *giveth* you the true bread from heaven.” (John vi.32.) This last text, be it noted, was one with which Erskine silenced the General Assembly in Scotland, when he was accused of offering Christ too freely to sinners.”<sup>(9)</sup>

### 2.3 Ryle on John 6:32

“[But my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.] ...The expression “giveth you,” must not be supposed to imply actual reception on the part of the Jews. It rather means “giving” in the sense of “offering” for acceptance a thing which those to whom it is offered may not receive.- It is a very remarkable saying, and one of those which seems to me to prove unanswerably that Christ is God’s gift to the whole world, - that His redemption was made for all mankind, - that He died for all, - and is offered to all.....It is a gift no doubt which is utterly thrown away, like many other gifts of God to man, and is profitable to none but those that believe. But that God nevertheless does in a certain sense actually “give” His Son, as the true bread from heaven, even to the wicked and unbelieving, appears to me to be incontrovertibly proved by the words before us. ....Fairly interpreted, the words mean that in some sense or another the Father does actually “give” the Son to those who are not believers.”<sup>(10)</sup>

### 2.4 Ryle on John 10:15

“[And I lay down my life for the sheep.]...Taken alone and by itself this sentence undoubtedly contains the doctrine of particular redemption. It declares that Christ “lays down His life for the sheep.” That He does so in a special sense I think none can deny. The “sheep” alone, or true believers, obtain any saving benefit from His death. But to argue from this text, that in no sense and in no way did Christ die for any beside His “sheep,” is to say what

seems to be to contradict Scripture. The plain truth is that the extent of redemption is not the leading subject of this verse. Our Lord is saying what He does for His sheep: He loves them so that He dies for them. But it does not follow that we are to conclude that His death was not meant to influence and effect (sic) the position of all mankind.’’(11)

### **3 RYLE’S EXPOSITION OF THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT ANALYSED**

In the light of the above extended comments, we feel that it is safe to say that we have done justice to the good bishop’s views on the extent of the atonement. We now proceed to analyse his view and to comment on his conclusions, first by seeking to do justice to the elements in his argument that deserve respect, and then by an attempted criticism of what appear to be weaknesses in his case.

#### **3.1 Ryle not Writing as an Arminian**

First of all, it is important to notice that Ryle does not write as an Arminian. He has said that in the matter of election and conversion, “I see limitation most clearly’’.(12) As we have seen he is willing to accept that Christ has died for His elect “in a special sense’’ beyond what He has done for others.

#### **3.2 Ryle Seeking to set Scripture above System**

Secondly, one respects his deep desire to honour the content of Scripture above theological system, however orthodox.

### **3.3 Ryle's Concern for the "Free Offer of the Gospel"**

Thirdly, and this is important, as an evangelical with a great burden for evangelism, Ryle was evidently concerned about any interpretation of Scripture that would inhibit the "free offer of the gospel". It is notorious that hyper-Calvinism tended to do that, although one should be careful to add that the majority of those holding to particular redemption were not hyper-Calvinists. This concern is evidenced in his citing of Erskine's experience, and also his comment, not quoted above, that because Christ gives (i.e. offers) the true bread from heaven even to wicked Jews, these words, " warrant preachers and teachers in making a wide, broad, full, free, unlimited offer of Christ to all mankind without exception."<sup>(13)</sup>

### **3.4 Ryle not Writing in Ignorance of the Reformed Position**

Further, Ryle does not write as one unaware of more restrictive interpretations of the texts - he is not writing from an ill-informed position. For example, he notes, on John 1:29, that "some say...it only means that Christ takes away the sin of Gentiles as well as Jews", and in his comments on John 3:16 he cites "Hutcheson, Lampe, and Gill" as holding a more restrictive view of the significance of the word "world".<sup>(14)</sup>

## **4 RYLE'S EXPOSITION OF THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT CRITICISED**

However, when one has freely conceded all this, there remain certain criticisms of Ryle's argument on the extent of the atonement.

### **4.1 Ryle's Failure to do Justice to Propitiation's Implications**

Firstly, much as one desires to respect Ryle's commitment to Scripture, it is apparent that he does not do justice to the implications of the substitutionary and propitiatory aspects of Christ's sacrifice, although of course Ryle believed in these aspects. The problem facing all advocates of a universal atonement is how such a sacrifice can be truly propitiatory and universal without allowing universal salvation. Historically, those who have felt the force of this, and yet retained a belief in universal atonement have to adopt one of two courses. Either they reduce the aspect of propitiation, as Grotius, in the Governmental Theory of the Atonement, or they move towards universal salvation. If neither of these courses is followed, then, like the esteemed subject of this thesis, they are left with an inexplicable inconsistency. No matter how much one feels sympathy for Ryle's insistence that Scripture stands above human systems, one cannot simply ignore theological implications inherent in a position on the grounds that the Bible must be followed even if it is contrary to our system, without first seeking to make sure that we may, in fact, be failing to understand the Bible.

### **4.2 Ryle's Vagueness on the Concept of Universality**

Secondly, and in keeping with what we have just said, we notice that in contrast with his usual clarity and authority, Ryle, in defending the



universality of the atonement, becomes vague in explaining just how the atonement is universal. For example, on John 6:32, as we have seen, he uses the expression “in some sense or another” the Father gives the Son “to those who are not believers.” Again, on John 1:29, in upholding the universal atonement, because atonement is vicarious and particular, Ryle is compelled to reduce the obvious meaning of the words “taketh away” to “*in some ineffable and inscrutable way*, the whole world’s sin was borne and atoned for...”<sup>(15)</sup>

### **4.3 Ryle’s Weakening Efficacy by Means of Extent**

Thirdly, Ryle maintains the extent of the atonement at the expense of its efficacy, although to be fair, one can hardly think that this is his intention. We refer again to his comments on John 1:29, noting that in setting out the two views on the extent of the atonement reflected in expositions of the text, he “decidedly” supports the view that Christ “made an atonement sufficient for all, and that all are salvable, though not all saved, in consequence of His death.”<sup>(16)</sup> It is here that our stout-hearted evangelical most seriously loses his theological bearings, for he is embracing a position very close to Arminianism. The idea that the work of Christ does not in fact save has been refuted at a popular level, by one of Ryle’s contemporaries, the Baptist Charles Haddon Spurgeon. The rebuttal is given in his own inimitable style:

“We are often told that we limit the atonement of Christ, because we say that Christ has not made a satisfaction for all men...our reply to this is, that, on the other hand, our opponents limit it: we do not. The Arminians say, Christ died for all men. Ask them what they

mean by it. Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of all men? They say, “No, certainly not.” We ask them the next question - Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of any man in particular? They answer “No.” They are obliged to admit this, if they are consistent. They say “No. Christ has died that any man may be saved if” - and then follow certain conditions of salvation. Now, who is it that limits the death of Christ? Why, you. You say that Christ did not die so as infallibly to secure the salvation of anybody. We beg your pardon, when you say we limit Christ’s death: we say, “No, my dear sir, it is you that do it.” We say that Christ so died that he infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no man can number, who through Christ’s death not only may be saved, but are saved and cannot by any possibility run the hazard of being anything but saved. You are welcome to your atonement; you may keep it. We will never renounce ours for the sake of it.”<sup>(17)</sup>

In less picturesque language, Jim Packer makes a similar point when he says of Calvinism, in contrast with Arminianism, “Calvary..not merely made possible the salvation of those for whom Christ died; it ensured that they would be brought to faith and their salvation made actual. The Cross saves.”<sup>(18)</sup>

#### **4.4 Ryle’s Inconsistency in Acknowledging Limitation**

Another matter for concern in Ryle’s view of the extent of the atonement, is the inconsistency in the limitation of some aspects of the Divine work in soteriology and the absence of such limitation in the matter of the atonement.

For Ryle avers, as we have seen, “In the work of the Father in election and in the work of the spirit (sic) in conversion I see limitation in the Bible most clearly. But in the work of Christ in atonement I see no limitation.” Contrast this with the clarity of Packer’s analysis of the Divine work of salvation: “...God saves sinners...the Triune Jehovah, Father, Son and Spirit; three Persons working together in sovereign wisdom, power and love to achieve the salvation of a chosen people, the Father electing, the Son fulfilling the Father’s will by redeeming, the Spirit executing the purpose of Father and Son by renewing.”<sup>(19)</sup>

#### **4.5 Other Weaknesses in Ryle’s Position**

More could be said about Ryle’s failure to link the atonement to the saving benefits of calling, regeneration, faith and so on, but we have said enough to establish his doctrine, usually so soundly reformed, as being inadequate at this particular point.

### **5 CONCLUSION**

Nevertheless, even here, we must realize that Bishop Ryle’s aberration is not concerning the saving work itself, but is rather a failure to think theologically in terms of the interpretation of the biblical data on one particular issue.

## Part 5 The Doctrine of the Work of Christ

### Chapters 15-17 THE OFFICES OF CHRIST: (2) THE PRIEST

## Chapter 17

# CHRIST'S HEAVENLY PRIESTLY MINISTRY

“Of what advantage to us is Christ's ascension into heaven?

First, that He is our Advocate in the presence of his Father in heaven..”

(Heidelberg Catechism)<sup>(1)</sup>

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Christ's heavenly priestly work is of prime importance for Bishop Ryle, firstly because of its pastoral value, but also for its polemical value against Rome and the Anglo-Catholic party in the Church of England.

Ryle's most extended discussion of this ministry of Christ is in his paper “The Priest”.<sup>(2)</sup> In our examination of Ryle's views, we will consider first his concept of the nature of Christ's priestly work in heaven, His fitness for such a ministry, and the pastoral and polemical application of the truth. We will make use of Ryle's extended paper mentioned above, but also quote from other works that bear on his presentation of Christ's heavenly ministry.

## 2 THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S HEAVENLY MINISTRY

For Ryle, there are six facets of Christ's heavenly work that must be considered.

### 2.1 Pleading the Merits of His Atonement

“We need not doubt that Christ, as our Priest, is *ever presenting the merits of His sacrifice for us before God*. Of course He has no need to repeat that sacrifice. “By one offering He has perfected forever those that are sanctified.” (Heb.x.14.) But in some ineffable manner He is ever in God's presence as the Bearer of the sins of His people. The atonement made on the cross for us is kept continually in remembrance by the appearance of Him who made it....The Priest who offered the sacrifice is always in heaven: the sacrifice is never forgotten in heaven: so they that trust in it are always acceptable in heaven...”<sup>(3)</sup>

He says much the same thing in his paper, “Christ's Power to Save”, in his book, ‘*Old Paths*’?<sup>(4)</sup> Commenting on Hebrews 7:25, he writes: “..Christ...is ever presenting on their [Christians] behalf His own perfect sacrifice, and His all-sufficient merit, before God the Father.”<sup>(5)</sup>

### 2.2 Making Intercession for His People

“Again: we need not doubt that Christ, as our priest, is *ever interceding for us* in heaven. It is written, “He is able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him, because He ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (Heb.vii.25.) It is asked by St.Paul, “Who is he that condemneth?” and one reason he gives

why there is no condemnation for believers, is the fact that “Christ maketh intercession for us.” (Rom.viii.34.) Of the manner of that intercession we cannot of course speak particularly: we may not intrude into things unseen. But it may suffice us to remember how our Lord prayed for His people in the seventeenth chapter of John, and how He told Peter He prayed for him, that his faith might not fail. (Luke xxii. 32.) Our great High Priest knows how to intercede...”(6)

It is noteworthy that in using the analogy of Christ’s prayer in John 17, Ryle elsewhere guards against a crassly literal parallel - commenting in his “*Expository Thoughts*” on John 17:9 he says:

“To say, as some have said, that our Lord’s intercessory prayer is an exact specimen of what He does in heaven as our High Priest, is straining a point, and going too far. To suppose that the Son literally *asks* things of the Father by prayer in heaven, is in my judgment unreasonable, and a very limited, narrow view of Christ’s intercession....Let it suffice us to believe that the intercession of this chapter exhibits accurately Christ’s mind toward believers, His desires for believers, the active interest He takes in believers, and the graces He would fain see in believers.”(7)

### **2.3 Bearing Believers’ Names Before the Father**

“Again: we need not doubt that Christ, as our Priest, *presents the names of His people continually before His Father*. The Jewish high priest had the names of the tribes of Israel engraved on the

ornaments he wore upon his head and shoulders. That this was the figure of something which Christ is ever doing for Christians in heaven, is clear and plain as the day. He “appears in the presence of God for us.” (Heb.ix.24.) He acts as the Representative of His people. Through Him they are known and thought for in heavenly places, long before they go there. The interests and safety of the body are secured and provided for, because the Head is already in heaven....”(8)

#### **2.4 Giving Acceptance and Efficacy to the Prayers of His People**

“Christ, as our Priest, *presents the prayers and services of His people before God*, and obtains for them hearing, acceptance and favour. Like the Jewish priest, He offers incense within the veil (Lev.xvi.12,13), and that incense is mingled with the prayers of His saints. (Rev.viii.3.).... Prayers that are worth nothing in themselves are effectual, when offered “through Christ, -for the sake of Christ, -through the mediation of Christ.” Expressions like these are so common, that few duly weigh their meaning. But rightly considered, they are full of deep doctrine, even the doctrine of the priestly office of Jesus.”(9)

#### **2.5 Being Friend, Advocate and Counsellor of His People**

“Again...Christ, as our Priest in heaven, *is ever doing the work of a Friend*, a Protector, a Counsellor, and Advocate, on behalf of His people. It is not for nothing that we are told that He is “at God’s right hand” (Rom.viii.34), and that He “sitteth at the right hand of

God.” (Coloss.iii.1; 1 Peter iii.22.) These words have a deep meaning. They teach that Christ is ever watching over the interests of His people, and providing a continual supply of all that they need. -”He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.” “We have an Advocate with the Father, - Jesus Christ the righteous.” (Psalm cxxi.4; 1 John ii.1.) - To hear the daily confessions of His saints, and grant them daily absolution; to sympathize with them in all their troubles, guide them in all their perplexities, strengthen them for their duties, preserve them in their temptations, - all this is part of Christ’s priestly office. What else can be the meaning of St.Paul’s (sic) words, when he says to the Hebrews, “Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need”? (Heb.iv.16.) The Priesthood of Jesus is the very hinge and pivot on which the whole exhortation turns.”<sup>(10)</sup>

There is a touching comment by Ryle on this aspect of Christ’s heavenly ministry in his exposition of Christ’s words recorded in Luke 22:32 - “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not”. This is how he expresses it:

“We learn..in these verses, one great secret of a believer’s perseverance in the faith....It was owing to Christ’s intercession that Peter did not entirely fall away. The continued existence of grace in a believer’s heart is a great standing miracle. His enemies are so mighty, and his strength is so small, the world is so full of snares, and his heart is so weak, that it seems at first sight impossible for



him to reach heaven. The passage before us explains his safety. He has a mighty Friend at the right hand of God, who ever lives to make intercession for him. There is a watchful Advocate, who is daily pleading for him, seeing all his daily necessities, and obtaining daily supplies of mercy and grace for his soul. His grace never altogether dies, because Christ always lives to intercede. (Heb.vii.25)''<sup>(11)</sup>

## **2.6 Being Receiver of Sinners and Mediator between God and Man**

“We need not doubt that Christ as a Priest in heaven is continually *doing the work of a Receiver of sinners, and a Mediator between God and man.* The priest was the person to whom the Israelite was bidden to go, when he was ceremonially unclean and wanted forgiveness. The command was distinct: “Go to the priest..” The Heavenly Priest is the person to whom labouring and heavy-laden souls ought always to be directed when they want pardon and rest..The power of absolving every sinner that comes to Him is one grand part of Christ’s priestly office.....“Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree, Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” (Acts v.31.)<sup>(12)</sup>

### **3 CHRIST'S FITNESS FOR HIS HEAVENLY PRIESTLY MINISTRY**

What are the qualities that fit Jesus Christ for His great heavenly priestly ministry? Bishop Ryle tells us with his customary eloquence and feeling.

“...Who can describe fully the singular fitness of our Lord Jesus Christ to be the Priest of man? - His possession of all power in heaven and earth, so that He is able to save to the uttermost, and no case is too hard for Him, and no sinner too bad to be saved, - His tenderness and sympathy, so that He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, - His long-suffering and patience, so that He can bear with our weaknesses and pity our mistakes, - His wisdom, His faithfulness, His readiness to aid, - who can describe or number up these things? None know them but those who know them by experience: and even they know very little of their extent.”<sup>(13)</sup>

Clearly, for Ryle, Christ's glory as High Priest in heaven is the combination of His absolute authority, His sympathising humanity and the perfection of His character.

### **4 THE PASTORAL APPLICATION OF THE DOCTRINE**

#### **4.1 The Value of Christ's Heavenly Ministry**

For Ryle the truth of Christ's priestly intercession and care is first of all “the great secret of *daily comfort* in Christianity.”<sup>(14)</sup> Our lawful absorption in our mundane lives “often seem(s) to drink up all our thoughts, and swallow(s) up all our attention. But, oh, what an unspeakable comfort it is to remember that we have an High Priest in heaven, who never forgets us night and day, and is

continually interceding for us, and providing for our safety.’’(15)

Secondly, “Christ’s Priesthood is the great secret of a saint’s *perseverance to the end*. Left to ourselves there would be little likelihood of our getting safe home....But, thanks be to God, the Priesthood of Christ secures our safety. - ...grant us the continual intercession of an Almighty Priest in heaven...and we shall never be lost.’’(16)

#### **4.2 The Practical Response to Christ’s Heavenly Ministry**

Bishop Ryle could seldom teach a doctrine without enforcing it on the conscience of his readers or hearers. For him, if there is a “Great High Priest”, then we need to be sure that we have an interest in Him. As he expresses it so forcefully:

“We may be sure, if we have a religion without a Priest or any Priest except Christ, we are in awful danger: we are yet unpardoned, unforgiven, unfit to die, unprepared to meet God....We must lay hold of Christ as our Mediator and Advocate, or else we shall never be saved.’’(17)

And if we do have a saving interest in Christ, then

“let us use Him regularly, and keep nothing back from Him. It is a sorrowful fact that many believers enjoy the Gospel far less than they ought to do, for lack of boldness in using the priestly office of Jesus Christ....Let us think of Jesus Christ as a loving Friend, to whom we may go morning, noon, and night, and get relief from Him every day.’’(18)

## **5 THE POLEMICAL VALUE OF THE DOCTRINE**

There were two evils that the evangelical bishop could see exposed and refuted by the doctrine of Christ's heavenly priesthood; these were prayers to the saints and the Virgin Mary, and auricular confession.

### **5.1 Opposing Prayers to the Saints and the Virgin**

Ryle's protestant soul was outraged by the Romanist practice of prayers to the saints. One can sense the outrage as he writes:

“What greater folly can be conceived than to flee to the Virgin Mary or the saints...when we have such a Priest as Jesus Christ in heaven? What can a woman, who herself needed a “Saviour,” do for the souls of others? ...What has she done to prove her love to sinners, compared to the Great High Priest, - Christ the Lord?”<sup>(19)</sup>

“Why should we confess our sins to angels and dead saints, while we have Christ for a High Priest? Why should we confess to the Virgin Mary, Michael the Archangel, John the Baptist, St. Paul, or any other creature in the unseen world!...There is no need for such a confession. Christ has not given up His office, and ceased to be a Priest. The saints and angels cannot possibly do more for us than Christ can. They certainly have not more pity or compassion, or more good-will towards our souls.”<sup>(20)</sup>

## 5.2 Opposing Auricular Confession

Our protestant champion was strongly opposed to the practice of auricular confession, which was being encouraged by some of the Ritualists in the Established Church. One of the main reasons for Ryle's opposition was that such a practice was a derogation of Christ's Priestly ministry. As he says in his paper on "Confession"<sup>(21)</sup>:

"If we love our souls, let us beware of giving to ministers the honour that belongs to Christ alone. He is the true High Priest of the Christian's profession. He ever lives to receive confessions, and to absolve sinners. Why should we turn away from Him to man? Above all, let us beware of the whole system of the Romish confessional. Of all the practices that were ever devised by man in the name of religion, I firmly believe that none was ever devised so mischievous and objectionable as the confessional. It overthrows Christ's office, and places man in the seat which should only be occupied by the Son of God."<sup>(22)</sup>

## 6 CONCLUSION

Here then is Bishop Ryle's exposition of the heavenly ministry of Christ the Priest. We suggest that it is strong, doctrinally, effective and relevant pastorally, and that it offers an adequate rebuttal of the Romish practices of prayers to the saints, and auricular confession.

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**(NOTE)** Because Ryle's treatment of Christ as King is mostly related to His Second Advent, we will not deal with it next, but reserve our discussion of the subject for our consideration of Ryle's Eschatology.

## Part 6 The Application of the Work of Redemption

### Chapter 18

#### THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

“Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour.”

(Article XVII of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion)

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

As far as we can ascertain, Bishop Ryle never developed an “*ordo salutis*” in his writings, which is understandable in view of their generally “occasional” character. However, he did write extensively on the various aspects of the application of redemption, and in fact devoted a substantial paper to the subject of election.<sup>(1)</sup> Ryle’s treatment of the subject is, as usual, firstly doctrinal, and then, pastoral. He is at pains to define and defend the doctrine, but equally concerned that the doctrine should not be abused. And he makes it clear that the doctrine should have practical effects in our lives.

#### 2 ELECTION DEFINED

Ryle is not unaware of the peril and potentially disastrous consequences of a lack of clarity in understanding this doctrine - he is not without a sense of history. As he says: “No doctrine of Scripture perhaps has suffered so much damage from the erroneous concepts of foes, and the incorrect descriptions of

friends, as that which is now before us.”<sup>(2)</sup> Therefore, “Accurate statements on this point are of great importance.”<sup>(3)</sup> The bishop then proceeds to give his definition:

“The true doctrine of Election I believe to be as follows. God has been pleased from all eternity to choose certain men and women out of mankind, whom by His counsel secret to us, He has decreed to save by Jesus Christ. None are finally saved except those who are thus chosen. Hence the Scripture gives to God’s people in several places the names of “God’s Elect”, and the choice or appointment of them to eternal life is called “God’s election.”

Those men and women whom God has been pleased to choose from all eternity, He calls in time, by His Spirit working in due season. He convinces them of sin. He leads them to Christ. He works in them repentance and faith. He converts, renews, and sanctifies them. He keeps them by His grace from falling away entirely, and finally brings them safe to glory. In short God’s eternal Election is the first link in that chain of a sinner’s salvation of which heavenly glory is the end. None ever repent, believe, and are born again, except the Elect. The primary and original cause of a saint’s being what he is, is eternal God’s election.”<sup>(4)</sup>

Even the most cursory glance at this definition discloses just how closely Ryle keeps to the official formulary of the Church of England in expressing himself. Phrase after phrase is taken directly from Article XVII, and the description of the effects of the grace of election follows closely the logical



order of the Article concerned. The bishop does not feel free to go beyond the confessional statement - there is no mention of reprobation, or any speculation as to infra- or supralapsarianism. This is of course in keeping with Ryle's own moderate calvinism, but it is perhaps more. Later on in the paper he affirms: "A wiser statement of the true doctrine of personal Election was never penned by the hand of uninspired man. It is thoroughly well-balanced and judiciously proportioned."<sup>(5)</sup> Assuming, as we must, that this statement should be taken at face value, Ryle follows the formulary because of its intrinsic excellence, not merely because it reflects his viewpoint.

It is also very important to note how the bishop places the doctrine in a Christocentric and salvific context. It is significant that the 39 Articles place the article on predestination and election in that section of the Articles that deal with soteriology, not with those connected more closely to the doctrine of God. This, to some extent follows Calvin, who deals with the subject in Book III, rather than more modern treatments, such as The Westminster Confession of Faith (17th Century), R.L.Dabney (19th Century) or, more recently, Louis Berkhof and Herman Hoeksema.

This Christocentric and soteriological treatment is reminiscent of Staupitz' celebrated counsel to Luther : "If you wish to debate predestination, begin with the wounds of Christ."<sup>(6)</sup>

### **3 ELECTION DEFENDED**

Having stated the doctrine, the bishop now seeks to defend it. He points out that many reject the doctrine - "No part of the Christian religion has been so much disputed, rejected, and reviled as this."<sup>(7)</sup> And the cause of the rejection? "None (other doctrine) has called forth so much of that enmity against God which is the grand mark of the carnal mind....The very mention of the word to some persons is enough to call forth expressions of anger, ill-temper, and passion."<sup>(8)</sup>

#### **3.1 Defended from Scripture**

As always with Ryle, the touchstone for testing any doctrine is Holy Scripture - as he says here: "...is the doctrine of Election plainly stated in Scripture? This is the whole question which an honest Christian has to do with...Is Election in the Bible, or is it not? Does the Bible speak of certain persons or not?"<sup>(9)</sup> Then follows a catena of Scripture texts, from the gospels (Matthew 24:22; Mark 13:22; Matthew 24:31; Luke 18:7), from the Pauline corpus (Romans 8:29-30; Romans 8:33; Ephesians 1:4; II Timothy 1:9; II Thess.2:13) and from the Petrine epistles (I Peter 1:2 and II Peter 1:10).<sup>(10)</sup> He continues, in his usual blunt way:

"I place these eleven texts before my readers, and I ask them to consider them well. If words have any meaning at all, they appear to me to teach most plainly the doctrine of personal Election. In the face of such texts I dare not refuse to believe that it is a Scriptural doctrine. I dare not, as an honest man, shut my eyes against the plain, obvious sense of Bible language.... The eleven texts above

quoted seem to my mind to prove conclusively that personal Election is a doctrine of Scripture. As such I must receive it, and I must believe it, however difficult it may be.”<sup>(11)</sup>

### **3.2 Defended Theologically**

Ryle’s theological argument is developed along three lines.

*Firstly*, there is the plain phenomenon of human experience of salvation. As the bishop expresses it:

“After all, whatever men may please to say, there is no denying that the Election of some men and women to salvation is a simple matter of fact. That all professing Christians are not finally saved, but only some, -that those who are saved owe their salvation entirely to the free grace of God and the calling of His Spirit, -that no man can at all explain why some are called unto salvation and others are not called, -all these are things which no Christian who looks around him can pretend for a moment to deny. Yet what does all this come to but the doctrine of Election?”

*Secondly*, we must consider the implications of the doctrine of human depravity. Ryle continues:

“Right views of human nature are certain to lead us to the same conclusion. Once admit that we are all naturally dead in trespasses and sins, and have no power to turn to God,-once admit that all spiritual life in the heart of man must begin with God,-once admit that He who created the world by saying, ‘Let there be light,’ must

shine into man's heart, and create light within him,-once admit that God does not enlighten all professing Christians in this manner, but only some, and that He acts in this manner entirely as a Sovereign, giving no account of His matters,-once admit this, and then see where you are. Whether you know it or not, you admit the whole doctrine of Election!"(12)

*Thirdly*, our doctrine of God leads us to the doctrine of election. Ryle develops this argument as follows:

"Right views of God's nature and character, as revealed in the Bible, appear to me to bring us to the same position. Do we believe that God knows all things from eternity,-that He governs all things by His Providence, and that not even a sparrow falleth to the ground without Him? Do we believe that He works all His works by a plan, like an architect of perfect knowledge, and that nothing concerning His saints, as His choicest and most excellent work, is left to chance, accident, and luck? -Well, if we believe all this, we believe the whole doctrine which this paper is meant to support. This is the doctrine of Election."(13)

### **3.3 Evaluation of Ryle's Defence of the Doctrine**

In considering the evangelical bishop's defence of the doctrine of Election, there are a number of observations that can be made. Firstly, we note the relatively narrow biblical base that Ryle uses. Eleven proof-texts seems a slim foundation for so weighty a doctrine, compared with the forty or so used by Steele and Thomas in the relevant section in their "The Five Points of

Calvinism Defined, Defended, Documented”<sup>(14)</sup> Ryle’s selection does not include even one text from the Old Testament or from the Johannine writings, and he makes no attempt to marshal the texts in a constructive and cumulative way. Now this cannot be because of his ignorance of the wealth of material - no man was more at home with the entire content of the Scriptures, and few of his day had a greater love for the puritans, the great seventeenth century expositors of the Doctrines of Grace.<sup>(15)</sup> It seems that Ryle’s purpose in giving his list of scriptures was simply to show that the whole concept was plainly biblical, and not to expound their particular significance.

Secondly, we may take note of the theological arguments he adduces. These too, are by no means as full as one might expect, and Ryle’s concern here appears to be to show that a consistent grasp of evangelical views, of which he gives three examples, will lead inevitably to a belief in the doctrine of Election. Characteristically, he chooses the “common-sense” arguments, which he regards as most telling in his particular ministry, and for his particular constituency.

Thirdly, there is one further peculiarity in Ryle’s argument which appears to be significant, not so much for proving his point, as for indicating his emphasis. Both in the argument from salvation, and in the argument from the need of depraved human beings, Ryle distinguishes between the “elect” and “professing Christians”, who may, or may not be, among the elect. One might have expected the distinction to be between the “elect” and the “reprobate”.

Why this peculiarity in Ryle’s thought? Two suggestions are given. He may

simply be contextualising Paul's famous argument in Romans 9:6 to the effect that "they are not all Israel who are of Israel", or, and in the writer's view more probably, he may be pointing to a difference between the truly converted and the mere professor that has its origins in Divine Election.

### **3.3 Defended against Objections**

At this point, we are obliged to say that even though we endorse Ryle's view of Election, his defence against objections is totally inadequate. He only deals with two arguments, neither of which is seriously theological, and neither of which would be used in a spirited defence of the Arminian position. He never touches on the Arminian concept of election based upon God's foreseeing of faith, nor does he deal with the argument based on the universal scope of the Divine promises. Instead he confines himself to a refutation of the idea of an election of nations - "Christian nations, as compared to heathen nations"<sup>(16)</sup>, and to answering those who denied that Election is taught by the Church of England. The former argument is easily disposed of by pointing out that "the Election spoken of in Scripture is an Election attended by the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost."<sup>(17)</sup> As to the doctrine of the Established Church, it is enough for the bishop to ask his opponents: "...turn to the 17th Article, and mark the following words..."<sup>(18)</sup> - which are a lengthy quotation from the said article, setting out the doctrine quite clearly and unequivocally.

## 4 GUARDING THE DOCTRINE AGAINST ABUSE

### 4.1 The Need to Guard the Doctrine

Bishop Ryle always shows himself to be a true pastor, and this pastoral concern is expressed in his treatment of the doctrine of Election. As he points out: “All revealed truth is liable to be wrested and perverted. It is one of Satan’s chief devices to make the Gospel odious by tempting men to distort it.”<sup>(19)</sup>

Ryle then gives two illustrations of the perversion of the doctrine. They are illuminating for their insight into the way the religious mind can rationalise, on the one hand, infidelity, and, on the other hand, antinomianism. They also indicate, perhaps, pastoral problems arising out of the doctrine that the bishop had faced during his ministry. It is the writer’s conviction that the pastoral problems described are perennial, and so Ryle’s treatment is quoted at length, for instruction as well as information!

“Perhaps no part of Christian theology has suffered so much damage in this way [of distortion and perversion] as the doctrine of personal Election. Let me explain what I mean.

“I am not one of God’s Elect,” says one man. “It is no use for me to do anything at all in religion. It is waste of time for me to keep the Sabbath, attend the public worship of God, read my Bible, say my prayers. If I am to be saved, I shall be saved. If I am to be lost, I shall be lost. In the mean time I sit still and wait.” This is a sore disease of soul. But I fear it is a very common one!

“I am one of God’s Elect,” says another man. “I am sure to be

saved and go to heaven at last, no matter how I may live and go on. Exhortations to holiness are legal [i.e. legalistic]. Recommendations to watch, and crucify self, are bondage. Though I fall, God sees no sin in me and loves me all the same. Though I often give way to temptation, God will not let me be altogether lost. Where is the use of doubts and fears and anxieties? I am confident I am one of the Elect, and as such I shall be found in glory.” This again, is a sore disease. But I fear it is not altogether uncommon.”<sup>(20)</sup>

## **4.2 The Way to Guard the Doctrine**

Clearly then, the doctrine can be abused, and therefore such abuse has to be guarded against. Ryle goes on to show us how.

### **4.2.1 Election and the Balance of Truth**

“Now what shall be said to men who talk in this way? They need to be told very plainly that they are wresting a truth of the Bible to their own destruction, and turning meat into poison. They need to be reminded that their notion of Election is a miserably unscriptural one. Election according to the Bible is a very different thing from what they suppose it to be. It is most intimately connected with other truths of equal importance with itself, and from these truths it ought never to be separated. Truths which God has put together no man should ever dare to put asunder.”<sup>(21)</sup>



#### **4.2.2 Election and Human Responsibility**

“For one thing, the doctrine of Election was never meant to destroy *man’s responsibility* for the state of his own soul. The Bible everywhere addresses men as free-agents, as beings accountable to God, and not as mere logs, and bricks, and stones. It is false to say that it is useless to tell men to cease to do evil, to learn to do well, to repent, to believe, to turn to God, to pray. Everywhere in Scripture it is a leading principle that man can lose his own soul, that if he is lost at last it will be his own fault, and his blood will be on his own head....The Bible never says that sinners miss heaven because they are not Elect, but because they “neglect the great salvation,” and because they will not repent and believe.<sup>(22)</sup>

#### **4.2.3 Election and the Free offer of the Gospel**

“For another thing, the doctrine of Election was never meant to prevent the *fullest, freest offer of salvation* to every sinner. In preaching...we are warranted and commanded to set an open door before every man, woman, and child, and to invite every one to come in. We know not who are God’s Elect, and whom He means to call and convert. Our duty is to invite all....To everyone we ought to say, “Awake, - repent, - believe, - come to Christ, - be converted...come, for all things are ready.”...We will invite all, in the firm belief that the invitation will do good to some. We will prophesy to dry bones, if God commands us. We will offer life to

all, though many reject the offer. In so doing we believe that we walk in the steps of our Master and His Apostles.”<sup>(23)</sup>

#### **4.2.4 Election and the Marks of the Elect**

For another thing, Election can only be *known by its fruits*. The Elect of God can only be discerned from those who are not Elect by their faith and life. We cannot climb up into the secret of God’s eternal counsels. We cannot read the book of life. The fruits of the Spirit, seen and manifested in a man’s conversation, [Ryle apparently uses the word in the old English sense of “way of life”] are the only grounds on which we can ascertain that he is one of God’s Elect. Where the marks of God’s Elect can be seen, there, and there only, have we any warrant for saying “this is one of the Elect.”.. It was when St.Paul remembered the faith and hope and love of the Thessalonians, that he cried, I “know your election of God.” (I Thess.i.4.) For ever let us hold fast this principle in considering the subject before us. To talk of any one being Elect while he is living in sin, is nothing less than blasphemous folly. The Bible knows of...no eternal choosing except that we should be “holy,” - no predestination except to be “conformed to the image of God’s Son.” When these things are lacking, it is mere waste of time to talk of Election. (1 Pet.i.2; Ephes.i.4; Rom.viii.29.)”<sup>(24)</sup>

#### **4.2.5 Election and the Use of the Means of Grace**

“Last, but not least, Election was never intended to prevent men making a *diligent use of all means of grace*. On the contrary, the neglect of means is a most suspicious symptom, and should make us very doubtful about the state of a man’s soul. Those whom the Holy Ghost draws He always draws to the written word of God and to prayer. When there is the real grace of God in a heart, there will always be love to the means of grace. [There follows a number of texts linking Election to the use of the means of grace.]...The evidence of texts like these is simply unanswerable and overwhelming. I shall not waste time by making any comment on them. An Election to salvation which teaches men to dispense with the use of all means of grace, may please ignorant people, fanatics and Antinomians. But I take leave to say that it is an Election of which I can find no mention in God’s Word.”<sup>(25)</sup>

#### **4.2.6 The Proper Use of the Doctrine of Election**

Ryle brings this portion of his teaching on the doctrine of Election to a close by citing the whole of the pastoral part of the 17th Article, adding: “These are wise words. This is sound speech that cannot be condemned. For ever let us cling to the principle concerned in this statement.”<sup>(26)</sup>

## 5 CONCLUSION

This then, is Bishop Ryle's doctrine of Election. Certainly it lacks profundity, and is not as incisive as one might wish. On the other hand, the treatment of the pastoral problems with which the doctrine is often associated is wisely handled, and Ryle has made his usual practical contribution in dealing with the pastoral implications of the doctrine.

## Part 6 The Application of the Work of Redemption

### Chapter 19

#### THE DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION

“All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by His almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.”

(Westminster Confession)<sup>(1)</sup>

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of regeneration was of the utmost importance for John Charles Ryle. Extended treatments of the subject appear in a number of his works.<sup>(2)</sup> In addition, he deals with the relationship of baptism to regeneration at length in a variety of works, which we hope to discuss under Ryle’s doctrine of the sacraments. In fact we have a plethora of material, and the difficulty is in deciding what may be left out in his discussion of the subject!

#### 2 HISTORICAL ECCLESIASTICAL CONTEXT

Ryle’s enthusiastic exposition of the doctrine of Regeneration stems from two contemporary problems in the religious life of Victorian England. One was the indifference to heart-felt religious experience which was typical of the

establishment, and the other was the increasingly dominant view of Baptismal Regeneration, held not only by old-fashioned “High” churchmen, but by the Anglo-Catholic Party in the Church of England. This adherence to the concept of Baptismal Regeneration came into sharp focus in the “Gorham Judgement” of 1850, arising out of the refusal of the Bishop of Exeter to institute the Rev. C.G. Gorham on the ground of unorthodoxy, as the latter did not believe in Baptismal Regeneration. Gorham’s appeal against the bishop’s action was upheld by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (the highest court in England), and the result threatened to split the Church of England wide open.<sup>(3)</sup>

### **3 RYLE’S EXPOSITION OF THE DOCTRINE**

In opening up Ryle’s exposition, we shall use part of the outline given by him in his paper “Regeneration” in ‘*Knots Untied*’<sup>(4)</sup>, and include material from his other works.

#### **3.1 The Meaning of Regeneration**

In ‘*Knots Untied*’, the bishop first gives a very simple, and theologically incomplete definition: “Regeneration means, that change of heart and nature which a man goes through when he becomes a true Christian.”<sup>(5)</sup> He later develops this by quoting a large number of Scriptures that describe the work of regeneration in a variety of ways, thus:

“This change of heart is spoken of continually in the Bible, under various emblems and figures. Ezekiel calls it “a taking away the stony heart, and giving a heart of flesh;” -“a giving a new heart,

and putting within us a new spirit.” (Ezek. xi.19; xxxvi.26.)

The Apostle John sometimes calls it being “born of God,” - sometimes being “born again,” -sometimes being “born of the Spirit.” (John i.13; 3:3,6.)... The Epistle to the Romans speaks of it as a “being alive from the dead.” (Rom. vi.13.)

The Second Epistle to the Corinthians calls it “being a new creature: old things have passed away, and all things become new.” (2 Cor.v.17.)

The Epistle to the Ephesians speaks of it as a resurrection together with Christ: “You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph.ii.1); as “a putting off the old man, which is corrupt, -being renewed in the spirit of our mind, -and putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” (Eph.iv. 22, 24.)...

The Epistle to Titus calls it “the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” (Titus iii.5.)

The First Epistle of Peter speaks of it as “a being called out of darkness into God’s marvellous light.” (1 Peter ii.9.) And the second Epistle, as “being made partakers of the Divine nature.” (2 Peter 1.4.)

The First Epistle of John calls it “a passing from death to life.” (1 John iii.14.)<sup>(6)</sup>

Commenting on this long list of apposite quotations, Ryle goes on:

“All these expressions come to the same thing in the end. They are all the same truth, only viewed from different sides. And all have one and the same meaning. They describe a great radical change of heart and nature, -a thorough alteration and transformation of the whole inner man, - a participation in the resurrection life of Christ; or to borrow the words of the Church of England Catechism, “A death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness.”

This change of heart in a true Christian is thorough and complete, so complete, that no word could be chosen more fitting to express it than the word “Regeneration,” or “new birth.” Doubtless it is no outward, bodily alteration, but undoubtedly it is an entire alteration of the inner man. It adds no new faculties to a man’s mind, but it certainly gives an entirely new bent and bias to all his old ones. His will is so new, his tastes so new, his opinions so new, his views of sin, the world, the Bible, and Christ so new, that he is to all intents and purposes a new man. The change seems to bring a new being into existence. It may well be called being “born again.”<sup>(7)</sup>

The above quotations show Ryle writing as an Evangelical, seeking to expound his position to other churchmen who might share, or might oppose his viewpoint. In *“The True Christian”*, a collection of sermons, we see him teaching the same truths in a directly evangelistic and pastoral way to his congregation. One can recognize the identity of theology, but, even today one is swept along by the sheer forcefulness of the presentation and breadth and



variety of the images used, as he seeks to impress upon his hearers the meaning of the new birth.

“To be born again is as it were to enter upon a new existence, to have a new mind and a new heart, new views, new principles, new tastes, new affections, new likings and dislikings, new fears, new joys, new sorrows, new love to things once hated, new hatred to things once loved, new thoughts of God and ourselves and the world and the life to come and the means whereby that life is attained....It is not so much that our natural powers and faculties are taken away and destroyed; I would rather say that they receive an utterly new bias and direction. It is not that the old metal is cast aside, but it is melted down and refined and remoulded, and has a new stamp impressed upon it, and thus, so to speak, becomes a new coin.

This is no outward change, like that of Herod, who did many things and then stopped, or of Ahab, who humbled himself and went in sackcloth and walked softly; nor is it a change which can neither be seen nor felt. It is not merely a new name and a new notion, but the implanting of a new principle which will surely bear good fruit. It is the opening of the eyes of the blind and unstopping the ears of the deaf; it is loosing the tongue of the dumb, and giving hands and feet to the maimed and lame, - for he that is born again no longer allows his members to be instruments and servants of unrighteousness, but he gives them unto God, and then only are they properly employed.

To be born again is to become a member of a new family...even the family of God;...it is to become the citizen of a new state...To be born again is a spiritual resurrection...the new birth of a man is a passage from death to life; it is a passage from ignorance of God to a full knowledge of Him, from slavish fear to childlike love, from sleepy carelessness about Him to fervent desire to please him...from strangeness towards God to heartfelt confidence...from an earthly, sensual man-pleasing state of mind to the single-eyed mind that is in Christ Jesus. And this it is to be born of the Spirit.’’(8)

We submit that here is theological truth on fire - communicated with deep conviction with a sweep of imagery that compels attention. It may lack the precision and brevity of a Louis Berkhof or the incisiveness of a John Murray, but it conveys something of the radical and far-reaching change of heart and disposition that is regeneration. And it confirms a conviction that has been growing in the writer’s mind that one of the salient features of Ryle’s theology is its practical thrust, reaching the reader or hearer with persuasive power.

### **3.2 The Cause of Regeneration**

Ryle’s fullest exposition of the cause of regeneration is given in the collection of sermons quoted above, in a second address on Regeneration:

“I shall now...set before you the first great cause of this new birth.....

This new birth, then, this great spiritual change, whence comes it, and how does it begin? Can any man give it to himself when he

pleases? Can any change his own heart? No! the thing is impossible. We can no more quicken and impart life to our souls than we can to our bodies; we can no more rise and become new men in our own strength than wash away sins by our own performances...The natural man is as helpless as Lazarus was when he lay still and cold and motionless in the tomb. We may remove the stone, as it were, and expose the sad work of death, but we can do no more. There must be a power far mightier than any power of earth in exercise before the natural man can awake and arise and come forth as a new creature. And to do all this is the special office of the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Ghost...It is He that quickeneth; it is He that giveth life. The Spirit alone can make the seed we scatter bear fruit...it is the Spirit must move over these waste and barren souls before they can become the garden of the Lord; it is the Spirit must open the darkened windows of our conscience before the true light can shine in upon those chambers within us....

It is not the plainest and clearest preaching...which can cause men to be born again, without the Spirit: you may set Paul to plant and Apollos to water, but the Spirit alone can give the increase....Not all the wisdom of Solomon, not all the faith of Abraham, not all the prophecies of Isaiah, not all the eloquence of the Apostles, could avail to convert one single soul without the operation of the Holy Ghost.' '(9)

Clearly, in this exhortation, Bishop Ryle is at pains to emphasise that Regeneration is a divine, not human work. He also, in keeping with the general tenor of Scripture, imputes the work to the third Person in the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. However, in the paper on Regeneration in "*Knots Untied*" he reminds us that this great work, though instrumentally that of the Spirit, is also ascribed, (in terms of origin and mediation) to the Father and the Son. As he says:

“Sometimes the change is ascribed to God the Father: “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath begotten us again unto a lively hope.” (1 Peter i.3.) Sometimes it is ascribed to God the Son: “The Son quickeneth whom He will.” (John iii.21) [Sic - this should be John v.21] “If ye know that He is righteousness [sic - should be “righteous”], ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him.” (1 John ii.29) Sometimes it is ascribed to the Spirit, -and He in fact is the great agent by whom it is always effected: “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John iii.6.)<sup>(10)</sup>

### **3.3 The Instruments in Regeneration**

It is clear from Ryle’s discussion of this aspect of the doctrine that he is not thinking so much of a strictly theologically defined instrument, such as the Word of God (see for example Peter 1:23-25 or James 1:18) as of the means evident in an observation of the phenomenon of Regeneration.

In fact, the bishop highlights three means - the preaching of the gospel, the Bible, and prayer.<sup>(11)</sup> At the same time he is careful to make it clear that in

pointing to these means, they are to be regarded as “ordinary” means. As he says:

“Now, with respect to the means which the Holy Spirit doth ordinarily use, I would not have you for one minute suppose that I wish to limit or set bounds to the Holy One of Israel. I do not for an instant deny that some have been born again without any outward visible machinery having been used - by a sort of secret impulse which cannot be well explained; but...generally speaking, the Holy Ghost, in giving to a man that blessed thing the new birth, is pleased to work upon his heart more or less by means which our eyes can see and which our minds can understand.”<sup>(12)</sup>

Writing on John 3:8, he comments:

“There is much about the wind that is mysterious and inexplicable....It is just the same with the operations of the Spirit, in the new birth of man. They may be mysterious, sovereign, and incomprehensible in many ways.”<sup>(13)</sup>

Nevertheless, there are observable ways whereby the Holy Spirit brings us to the new birth. The first of these to which Ryle draws our attention is that of the preaching of the gospel. For,

“This is the special instrument for turning men from darkness to light, and many a one can testify that it was through sermons that he was first touched, and brought to the knowledge of the truth. It was Peter’s preaching which first touched the men of Jerusalem after our

Lord's death, insomuch that they were pricked to the heart and said, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" It was the command which Jesus gave to the apostles before his ascension, they were "to preach unto the people and to testify."....No means is so blessed in all the experience of Christ's church as the plain preaching of the Gospel...for there is no ordinance in which the Holy Spirit is so particularly present, none by which sinners are so often converted and brought back to God."<sup>(14)</sup>

Closely associated with this is the factor of the Bible in the work of Regeneration.

"...seldom too is a man born of the Spirit without the *Bible* having something to do in the work. The Bible was written by men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and he who reads it seriously and attentively, or hears it read, is seeking acquaintance with God in God's own way. You would find few indeed among the Lord's true people who would not tell you that the starting-point in their spiritual life was some saying or doctrine in Scripture; some part or portion, pressed home upon their consciences by an unseen, secret power, was among the first things which stirred them up to think and examine their ways..."<sup>(15)</sup>

Lastly, there is the part played by prayer.

"...Never are men born of the Spirit without *Prayer*. I believe there would not be found a single case of a person who had been

quicken and made a new creature without God having been entreated of and inquired of before. Either he has prayed for himself, or someone has prayed for him: so Stephen died praying for his murderers, and by-and-by Saul was converted. The Lord loves to be sought after by His guilty creatures; and they who will not ask for the Holy Spirit to come down upon them have no right to expect in themselves any real change.”<sup>(16)</sup>

At this point it is necessary to emphasise that the quotations above are not from Ryle’s carefully prepared papers, but from his sermons. This means that the presentation is at a popular level, and not expressed with the theological precision necessary in a more formal presentation. At the same time, they do provide the insight of a pastor’s observations during a lifetime of spiritual leadership, and as such they may be a catalyst for a further refining of our theological understanding of Regeneration. Bishop Ryle also expounded at length on the evidences of Regeneration, and his comments are valuable. However, it is felt that these observations belong more properly to the subjective side of soteriology and we will therefore deal with them under the subject of Sanctification at a later stage.

## 4 COUNTERING FALSE VIEWS OF REGENERATION

### 4.1 Baptismal Regeneration

This is dealt with in our consideration of Ryle's doctrine of the Sacraments, so there is no need for further comment here.

### 4.2 Ecclesiastical Regeneration

In order to understand Ryle's treatment of this subject, we need to understand precisely what his opponents believed. This has been summarised admirably by Louis Berkhof:

“...there is...an influential party in the [Anglican] Church which distinguishes two kinds of regeneration: the one consisting merely in a change of one's relation to the Church and the means of grace; and the other, in a fundamental change of human nature. According to this party only the former is effected by baptism. This regeneration includes no spiritual renewal. By means of it man merely enters into a new relation to the Church, and becomes a child of God in the same sense in which the Jews became children of God through the covenant of which circumcision was a seal.”<sup>(17)</sup>

Now Bishop Ryle was well acquainted with this view, and rejected it in no uncertain terms. Mentioning this view, he writes:

“To all this I have one simple reply, and that is, *I can find no such Regeneration spoken of anywhere in the Bible.* A Regeneration which only means admission into a state of ecclesiastical privilege may be ancient and primitive [favourite terms of the Tractarians] for



anything I know. But something more than this is wanted. A few plain texts of Scripture are needed; and these texts have yet to be found. Such a notion of Regeneration is utterly inconsistent with that which St. John gives us in his first Epistle. It renders it necessary to invent the awkward theory that there are two Regenerations, and is thus eminently calculated to confuse the minds of unlearned people, and introduce false doctrine. It is a notion which seems not to answer to the solemnity with which our Lord introduces the subject to Nicodemus. When He said, "Verily, verily, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," did He only mean except a man be admitted to a state of ecclesiastical privilege? Surely He meant more than this. Such a Regeneration a man might have, like Simon Magus, and yet never be saved. Such a Regeneration he might never have, like the penitent thief, and yet see the kingdom of God. Surely, He must have meant a change of heart.... That a man is admitted into a state of great privilege when he is made a member of a pure Church of Christ, I do not for an instant deny. That He is in a far better and more advantageous position for his soul, than if he did not belong to the Church, I make no question..... *But I do not see that the Bible ever calls this Regeneration.* And I cannot find a single text in Scripture which warrants the assumption that it is so. It is very important in theology to distinguish things that differ. Church privileges are one thing; Regeneration is another. I for one, dare not confound them...The

only Regeneration that I can see in Scripture is, not a change of state, but a change of heart. That is the view, I once more assert, which the Church Catechism takes when it speaks of the “death unto sin, and new birth unto righteousness,” and on that view I take my stand.’’(18)

It is instructive to note the grounds on which Ryle rejects this view, which, on the face of it, removed certain problems associated with the doctrine. These arise from references to Regeneration in the Baptismal services of the Church of England, notably the comment after the baptism; “seeing this child is now regenerate.’’(19) It is evident from other writings,(20) that the bishop has difficulty in explaining the offending phrase, but he will not accept a solution that does not have the warrant of Holy Writ!

All this is indicative of the integrity, given his presuppositional framework, with which Ryle sets about developing his theology - ultimately he seeks to live, and write, under the authority of the Word of God.

## **6 EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION**

In summing up the bishop’s theological position on the doctrine of Regeneration, we see his orthodox evangelicalism given its own peculiar form according to his pastoral and polemical concern, with a strong emphasis on evangelistic and practical application, though at the cost of the loss of theological precision. At the same time, we are made aware that Regeneration is not merely a theological truth, it is an existential necessity!

## Part 6 The Application of the Work of Redemption

### Chapter 20

## REPENTANCE

“Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the Gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ. By it, a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature, and righteous law of God; and upon the apprehension of His mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavouring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments.”<sup>(1)</sup>

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of Repentance has always been of the greatest importance for Evangelical Christians. It holds an important place in the preaching of the puritans, reflected in the Westminster Standards, not only in the Confession but also in the Catechisms. Bishop Ryle, standing in this tradition, likewise has much to say on the subject. In addition to his more formal paper in *“Old Paths”*<sup>(2)</sup>, which will form the basis of our analysis of his teaching, he also expounds it in a number of other works.<sup>(3)</sup>

### 2 THE IMPORTANCE OF REPENTANCE

Commenting on Christ’s message of repentance, recorded in Mark 1:15, Ryle says:

“This is that old sermon which all the faithful witnesses of God have continually preached, from the very beginning of the world.

From Noah down to the present day the burden of their address has been always the same - "Repent and believe." The apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders, when he left them for the last time, that the substance of his teaching among them had been "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." Acts xx.21.) He had the best of precedents for such teaching. The Great Head of the Church had given him a pattern. Repentance and faith were the foundation stones of Christ's ministry. -Repentance and faith must always be the main subjects of every faithful minister's instruction.'"(4)

Again, in his paper on Repentance, Ryle insists on the vital importance of this aspect of conversion:

"The importance of the inquiry cannot be overstated. Repentance is one of the foundation-stones of Christianity. Sixty times, at least, we find repentance spoken of in the New Testament. What was the first doctrine our Lord Jesus Christ preached? We are told, that He said, "Repent ye, and believe the Gospel." (Mark i.15.) - What did the Apostles proclaim when the Lord sent them forth the first time? They "preached that men should repent." (Mark vi.12.) - What was the charge which Jesus gave His disciples when He left the world? That "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations." (Luke xxiv.47.) - What was the concluding appeal of the first sermons which Peter preached?-----

“Repent and be baptized.” “Repent ye, and be converted.” (Acts ii.38; iii.19.)... What was the description which Paul gave of his own ministry, when he made his defence before Festus and Agrippa? He told them that he had showed all men that they should “repent, and do works meet for repentance.” (Act xxvi.20.) ... - What is one of the first qualifications which the Church of England requires of all persons that would come to the Lord’s table? They are to “examine themselves whether they repent them truly of their former sins.” No impenitent person, according to the Church of England, ought ever to come to the Lord’s table. - Surely we must all agree that these are serious considerations. They ought to show the importance of the inquiry I am now making.”<sup>(5)</sup>

For Ryle, then, the doctrine is important because of the place it holds in Scripture, because of our Lord’s stress upon it, a stress maintained by the apostles and again emphasised in the formularies of the Church.

### **3 THE NATURE OF REPENTANCE**

After defining Repentance in very general terms as “a thorough change of man’s natural heart upon the subject of sin”<sup>(6)</sup>, the bishop goes on to affirm that a more detailed definition is required, for, “...the subject...deserves a closer and more searching investigation. It is not safe to deal in general statements, when doctrines of this kind are handled.”<sup>(7)</sup> He is set on showing us “the parts and portions of which repentance is made up.”<sup>(8)</sup> His analysis discloses five distinct elements, together with a controlling factor, faith, that distinguishes *evangelical* repentance from *legal* repentance.

### 3.1 Repentance and the Knowledge of Sin.

“True repentance begins with *knowledge of sin*. The eyes of the penitent man are opened. He sees with dismay and confusion the length and breadth of God’s holy law, and the extent, the enormous extent, of his own transgressions. He discovers, to his surprise, that in thinking himself a “good sort of man,” and a man with a “good heart,” he has been under a huge delusion. He finds out that, in reality, he is wicked, and guilty, and corrupt, and bad in God’s sight. His pride breaks down. His high thoughts melt away. He sees that he is neither more nor less than a great sinner. This is the first step in true repentance.”<sup>(9)</sup>

Let us note that this knowledge of sin, is not, as in so much present evangelistic literature, a bare acknowledgement of the fact of personal sin, but rather an awful awareness of a broken Divine law, and a deep sense of inward corruption. Ryle’s zeal as an evangelist does not lead him to minimise the depth of self-awareness required if there is to be true repentance.

### 3.2 Repentance and Sorrow for Sin

“True repentance goes on to work *sorrow for sin*. The heart of a penitent man is touched with deep remorse because of his past transgressions. He is cut to the heart...He mourns over time wasted, over talents misspent, over God dishonoured, over his own soul injured. The remembrance of these things is grievous to him. The burden of these things is sometimes almost intolerable. When a man so sorrows, you have the second step in true repentance.”<sup>(10)</sup>

Again, we must reflect on how the bishop demands depth of experience here; not just a sense of “having made a mess of our lives” but grief that we have dishonoured God - grief as deep as a severe laceration of the inner man - “cut to the heart.” And a particularising penitence that grieves over definite areas of failure - the wasting of time, the misuse of talents. Ryle’s very strong language about an intolerable burden is of course taken from his beloved Anglican liturgy.<sup>(11)</sup>

### **3.3 Repentance and the Confession of Sin**

“True repentance proceeds, further, to produce in a man *confession of sin*. The tongue of a penitent man is loosed. He feels he must speak to that God against whom he has sinned. Something within him tells him he must cry to God, and pray to God, and talk with God, about the state of his own soul. He must pour out his heart, and acknowledge his iniquities, at the throne of grace. They are a heavy burden within him, and he can no longer keep silence. He can keep nothing back. He will not hide anything. He goes before God, pleading nothing for himself, and willing to say, “I have sinned against heaven and before Thee: my iniquity is great. God be merciful to me, a sinner!” When a man goes thus to God in confession, you have the third step in true repentance.”<sup>(12)</sup>

What is striking in Ryle’s description here is the sense of inward necessity that the penitent feels. It is not merely that there is a duty to confess, if there is to be forgiveness. Rather, the penitent feels that it is impossible to be silent;

the heinousness of his offences and the burden of guilt have only one place of relief - at the throne of grace, and only one means of relief, heartfelt confession.

### 3.4 Repentance and Forsaking Sin

“True repentance, furthermore, shows itself before the world in a thorough *breaking off from sin*. The life of a penitent man is altered. The course of his daily conduct is entirely changed. A new King reigns within his heart...What God commands he now desires to practise; and what God forbids he now desires to avoid. He strives...to fight with sin, to war with sin, to get the victory over sin. He ceases to do evil. He learns to do well. He breaks off sharply from bad ways and bad companions. He labours, however feebly, to live a new life. When a man does this, you have the fourth step in true repentance.”<sup>(13)</sup>

It is noteworthy that Ryle’s picture of the change in a penitent man is not seen only in his conduct, but in his whole motivation. As Ryle expresses it: “A new King reigns within his heart.” There is nothing superficial about the change. He warns readers later in this paper: “Take heed that your repentance be a business of *your heart*. It is not a grave face...or a round of self-imposed austerities...The real grace is something far deeper than a mere affair of face, and clothes, and days, and forms.”<sup>(14)</sup> As a true pastor and physician of the soul, the bishop will not “heal the wound of his people slightly.” (Jeremiah 6:14) Without a real change in behaviour there is, for Ryle, no real evidence of repentance. “..feelings in religion are worse than worthless, unless they are



accompanied by practice. Mere sentimental excitement, without thorough breaking off from sin, is not the repentance which God approves.”<sup>(15)</sup>

### **3.5 Repentance and Hatred of All Sin.**

“True repentance, in the last place, shows itself by producing in the heart a settled habit of *deep hatred of all sin*. The mind of a penitent man becomes a mind habitually holy. He abhors that which is evil, and cleaves to that which is good. He delights in the law of God. He comes short of his own desires not unfrequently. [sic]...He is deeply conscious of his own infirmities. He groans under a sense of indwelling corruption. But still, for all that, the general bias of his heart is towards God, and away from evil. He can say with David, “I count all Thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way.” (Psa.cxix.128.) When a man can say this, you have the fifth, or crowning step, of true repentance.”<sup>(16)</sup>

### **3.6 Repentance and Faith**

“True repentance, such as I have just described, is never alone in the heart of any man. It always has a companion - a blessed companion. It is always accompanied by lively faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Wherever faith is, there is repentance; wherever repentance is, there is always faith. I do not decide which comes first, - whether repentance comes before faith, or faith before repentance. But I am bold to say that the two graces are never found separate, one from the other...The two things will always go side by side....Take heed, above all things, that your repentance be closely

*bound up with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.* See that your convictions be convictions which never rest except at the foot of the cross...Give me that conviction of sin which makes a man flee to Christ, and mourn, because by his sins he has pierced the Lord who bought him. Give me that contrition of soul under which a man feels much about Christ, and grieves to think of the despite he has done to so gracious a Saviour. Going to Sinai, hearing about the ten commandments, looking at hell, thinking about the terrors of damnation - all this may make people afraid, and has its use. But no repentance ever lasts in which a man does not look at Calvary more than at Sinai, and see in a bleeding Jesus the strongest motive for contrition. Such repentance comes down from heaven. Such repentance is planted in man's heart by God the Holy Ghost.''(17)

This is a very sound aspect to Ryle's doctrine of Repentance. It makes it very clear that true repentance is *believing* repentance, bound to the cross. It precludes the possibility of a non-evangelical legalism that will make a merit of repentance. It directs the penitent to that place where the burden he feels, will be rolled away. It also shows a true pastoral insight into the temporary nature of a repentance that is fed only by fear. Ryle's picture of evangelical repentance also leads him to identify it as a "grace". He uses the expression itself only sparingly, but his understanding of the source of repentance in sovereign grace is spelled out in the words "...repentance .... planted in man's heart by God the Holy Ghost.'"(18)

## 4 EVALUATION

Let it be said, first of all, that Ryle's doctrine of Repentance stands in marked contrast to much of the shallow treatment of the subject in much of contemporary evangelism. He does not regard repentance as either easy or superficial.

Secondly, his understanding of the inner dynamic of repentance shows a pastoral insight not so evident today. Many who would follow his "five points" of the elements of repentance, would not share his grasp of how soul-shaking a real knowledge of sin is. Nor would they understand his insight into the inward constraint in real confession of sin.

All in all, the evangelical bishop's treatment of the subject strikes one as theologically sound, and full of that pastoral concern and understanding that we have come to expect, and that is itself an important key to understanding his theology.

## Part 6 The Application of the Work of Redemption

### Chapter 21

#### FAITH AND JUSTIFICATION

“We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.”<sup>(1)</sup>

##### 1 INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of Justification by Faith is of course, central to evangelical religion. And so we find that it holds a prominent place in Ryle’s thought and teaching. Among his writings there are at least two that deal extensively with the subject,<sup>(2)</sup> and the bishop adverts to the truth very frequently in his works. It is our intention to look at the subject by considering the following elements, the Importance of Justification, the Nature of Justification, the Grounds of Justification, and the Instrument of Justification.

##### 2 THE IMPORTANCE OF JUSTIFICATION

Ryle deals with this aspect of the doctrine admirably in his sermon “The Lord our Righteousness.” He does so by setting forth two truths, first, that we need some righteousness to stand before a righteous God, and second, that we have no righteousness of our own.

###### 2.1 The Need of Righteousness

This need is proved in two ways; the plain statements of Scripture concerning those who are acknowledged by God, and those who are rejected by Him; and

the implications of the character of God as holy and just.

“First, then, I am to show you [that] you must have some righteousness. The Bible says plainly, “The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” “The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”...“The Lord loveth the righteous, but the way of the wicked He turneth upside down.” “The righteous hath hope in his death.” “The cursed shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.” “Have on the breastplate of righteousness,” says Paul to the Ephesians. And how shall any one presume to say that he can enter into heaven without it!

But I wish here to expose the folly of all those who talk in a loose and general way about God’s mercy. Men will often say, when urged to think about their salvation, “Indeed I know that I am not what I should be; I have broken God’s law very often, but He is very merciful, and I hope I shall be forgiven.” Truly, I do believe that the religion of many goes no further than this...ask them to explain the ground of their confidence; this is the only rock on which they build... “God is merciful” is the Alpha and the Omega,...the first and the last, of all their Christianity. Now, I am bold to say, beloved, this is an immense delusion; a refuge of lies that will not stand being compared with Scripture, and more than this, it will not last one instant in the fire of trial and affliction.

Have you not heard that God is a God of perfect holiness - holy in His character, holy in His laws, holy in His dwelling-place?....“He is a holy God,” says Joshua; “He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.”...And the book of Revelation, speaking of heaven, says, “There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth.”...And will you tell us, in the face of all these texts, that man, corrupt, impure, defiled - as the best of us surely is -shall pass the fiery judgment of our God and enter into the heavenly Jerusalem by simply trusting in the mercy of his Maker, without one single rag to cover his iniquities and hide his natural uncleanness. It cannot be: God’s mercy and God’s holiness must needs be reconciled, and you have not done this yet.

And have you never heard that God is a God of perfect justice, whose laws may not be broken without punishment, whose commandments must be fulfilled on pain of death.?...“Justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne,” says David. “The just Lord is in the midst,” says Zephaniah...I cannot find that these verses have ever been declared useless; I cannot discover any place which says the law is now let down, and need not be fulfilled; and how, then, can I teach you that it is enough to look to God’s mercy?...Show me, if you can, one single text which teaches that a man may be saved without the claims of the law having been satisfied.

You must have something to appear in at the marriage supper of the Lamb. You would not say a murderer should be acquitted, because he said he was sorry and hoped to be forgiven; you must make some amends to justice and to holiness; you cannot shut your eyes against the plain declarations of the Bible...there must be satisfaction for your sins, or you will perish everlastingly.’’(3)

## 2.2 The Absence of Righteousness

“I promised in the second place to show you that we have *no* righteousness of our own, and therefore by ourselves we cannot be saved.

Look at the law of God, and measure its requirements. Does it not ask of every man a perfect, unsinning obedience from first to last, in thought and word and deed, without one single failure in the slightest jot or tittle? And where is the son or daughter of Adam who can say, “All this I have performed”?...And how shall we then believe, though all the world persuade us to the contrary, that man can ever purchase his acceptance in the sight of God? So true are the words of that clear-sighted witness the apostle Paul, “By the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified.’’(4)

At this point we may be asking why Ryle’s exposition of Justification goes to such lengths to stress the need of Justification. The answer lies in the background of Victorian religion, which, on the one hand, was influenced by current optimism about human nature, and on the other hand, was in some

quarters relying on a religion of outward observance of religious rites and ceremonies.

### **3 THE NATURE OF JUSTIFICATION**

The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines Justification as “an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us..”<sup>(5)</sup> These two elements, pardon and a righteous standing before God, are emphasised by Ryle as the two constituent parts of Justification.

#### **3.1 Justification and Forgiveness**

“The true Christian’s peace arises from a consciousness of his sins being forgiven, and his guilt being put away. His house is not built on sandy ground. His well is not a broken cistern, which can hold no water. He has peace with God, because he is justified.

He is justified, and his sins are *forgiven*. However many, and however great, they are cleansed away, pardoned, and wiped out. They are blotted out of the book of God’s remembrance...They are searched for and not found. They are remembered no more. Though they may have been like scarlet, they are become white as snow; though they may have been red like crimson, they are as wool. And so he has peace.” <sup>(6)</sup>

#### **3.2 Justification and a Righteous Standing before God**

“He is justified and *counted righteous* in God’s sight. The Father sees no spot in him, and reckons him innocent. He is clothed in a



robe of perfect righteousness, and may sit down by the side of angels without feeling ashamed. The holy law of God, which touches the thoughts and intents of men's hearts, cannot condemn him. The devil, "the accuser of the brethren," can lay nothing to his charge, to prevent his full acquittal. And so he has peace."<sup>(7)</sup>

The italics used by Ryle in this passage are clear indications of the elements in Justification, and he is at pains, by allusions to, and quotations from, scripture, to show how complete is the pardon, and how perfect the righteousness enjoyed by the believer. In particular, the righteousness reckoned to him is seen from the point of view of the Father, the believer's conscience, the demands of the law, and the accusations of the devil. And confronted with all these, that righteousness is perfect. Truly, in this particular paragraph, Ryle shows himself the master of evangelical theology, in that he is able, in small compass, to set forth the multi-faceted glories of imputed righteousness.

#### **4 THE GROUNDS OF JUSTIFICATION**

The Belgic Confession describes the grounds of our justification thus: "...Jesus Christ imputing to us all his merits, and so many holy works, which he hath done for us, and in our stead, is our Righteousness."<sup>(8)</sup> Bishop Ryle stands in the Reformed tradition: hear him as he expounds how Jesus Christ is by virtue of His righteousness and atonement a sufficient foundation for a perfect justification. First, he expresses this in general terms:

"But how then is a true Christian justified? ...How can we understand a Holy God dealing with a sinful man as with one

innocent, and reckoning him righteous notwithstanding his many sins?

The answer to all these questions is short and simple. The true Christian is counted righteous for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is justified because of the death and atonement of Christ. He has peace because “Christ died for his sins according to the Scriptures.” This is the key that unlocks the mighty mystery. Here the great problem is solved, how God can be just and yet justify the ungodly. The life and death of the Lord Jesus explain all. “He is our peace.” (I Cor.xv. 3; Ephes.ii. 14.)<sup>(9)</sup>

Then, this evangelical of evangelicals expounds the truth in detail, making four particular emphases:

“Christ has *stood in the place* of the true Christian. He has become his Surety and his Substitute. He undertook to bear all that was to be borne, and to do all that was to be done, and what He undertook He performed. Hence the true Christian is a justified man. (Isai. liii. 6.)

Christ has *suffered for sins*, the “just for the unjust.” He has endured our punishment in His own body on the cross. He has allowed the wrath of God, which we deserved, to fall on His own head. Hence the true Christian is a justified man. (I Peter iii. 18.)

Christ has *paid the debt* the Christian owed, by His own blood. He has reckoned for it, and discharged it to the uttermost farthing by His own death. God is a just God, and will not require his debts to

be paid twice over. Hence the true Christian is a justified man. (Acts xx.28; I Peter i.18,19.)

Christ has *obeyed the law* of God perfectly. The devil, the Prince of this World, could find no fault in Him. By so fulfilling it He brought in an everlasting righteousness, in which all His people are clothed in the sight of God. Hence the true Christian is a justified man. (Dan. ix.24; Rom. x. 4.)''<sup>(10)</sup>

The bishop then wraps the subject up in an eloquent summary:

“Christ, in one word, has lived for the true Christian. Christ has died for him. Christ has gone to the grave for him. Christ has risen again for him. Christ has ascended up on high for him, and gone to heaven to intercede for his soul. Christ has done all, paid all, suffered all that was needful for his redemption. Hence arises the true Christian’s justification, - hence his peace. In himself there is nothing, but in Christ he has all things that his soul can require.(Coloss.ii.13)<sup>(11)</sup>

It is difficult to imagine a less ambiguous exposition of the all-sufficiency of Christ as the sole grounds of the sinner’s justification. Both the active and passive obedience of Christ are set forth, and the substitutionary character of His atonement.<sup>(12)</sup> This last is crucial, for the doctrine of imputed righteousness cannot be held consistently with any other view of Christ’s sacrifice.

## 5 THE INSTRUMENTAL CAUSE OF JUSTIFICATION

The Belgic Confession carefully expounds the role of faith in Justification thus: "...we do not mean, that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument, with which we embrace Christ our Righteousness....faith is the means by which we are kept in communion with him in all his benefits, which, when they have become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins."<sup>(13)</sup> Bishop Ryle's exposition is careful to ensure that we do not ascribe merit to faith, but that we also understand its true character and qualities.

### 5.1 The Positive Characteristics of Justifying Faith

Ryle is concerned that we should have a proper understanding of the nature of faith. He says:

"I need hardly say that it is of the utmost importance to have clear views about the nature of true saving faith. It is constantly spoken of as the distinguishing characteristic of New Testament Christians. They are called "believers." In the single Gospel of John, "believing" is mentioned eighty or ninety times. There is hardly a subject about which so many mistakes are made. There is none about which mistakes are so injurious to the soul...Let us try to get a distinct idea of its real nature."<sup>(14)</sup>

How are we to understand the nature of faith? Instead of detailed theological definition, Ryle employs vivid imagery:

"Saving faith is the *hand* of the soul. The sinner is like a drowning man at the point of sinking. He sees the Lord Jesus Christ holding

out help to him. He *grasps* it and is saved. This is faith. (Heb.vi. 18.)

Saving faith is the *eye* of the soul. The sinner is like the Israelite bitten by the fiery serpent in the wilderness, and at the point of death. The Lord Jesus is offered to him as the brazen serpent, set up for his cure. He *looks* and is healed. This is faith. (John iii. 14,15.)

Saving faith is the *mouth* of the soul. The sinner is starving for want of food, and sick of a sore disease. The Lord Jesus Christ is set before him as the bread of life, and the universal medicine. He *receives* it, and is made well and strong. This is faith. (John vi. 35.)

Saving faith is the *foot* of the soul. The sinner is pursued by a deadly enemy, and is in fear of being overtaken. The Lord Jesus Christ is put before him as a strong tower, a hiding place, and a refuge. He *runs into it* and is safe. This is faith. (Prov. xviii. 10.)''<sup>(15)</sup>

The evangelical bishop is not merely using pictorial language. He is choosing the biblical analogies for faith, (as an examination of the texts adduced will show), as the best illustrations of its character. In this writer's opinion his method secures its desired end. Faith is taken out of the categories of the esoteric, and made accessible to us all. It is shown as vigorous, yet dependant, active yet not meritorious. In each illustration, the sinner is shown in a state of need, Christ is the sufficient provision, to which faith adds nothing, but is merely the means whereby the provision is received.

## 5.2 Inadequate and False Views of Faith

Ryle now deals with erroneous ideas about faith, which he is at pains to correct.

“True saving faith is *not the possession of everybody*. The opinion that all who are called Christians are, as a matter of course, believers, is a most mischievous delusion. A man may be baptized, like Simon Magus, and yet have “no part or lot” in Christ. The visible Church contains unbelievers as well as believers. “All men have not faith.” (2 Thess. iii.2.)

True saving faith is *not a mere matter of feeling*. A man may have many good feelings and desires in his mind toward Christ, and yet they may all prove as temporary and short-lived as the morning cloud and the early dew. Many are like the stony-ground hearers, and “receive the word with joy.” Many will say under momentary excitement, “I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest,” and yet return to the world. (Matt.viii. 19; xiii. 20.)

True saving faith is *not a bare assent of the intellect* to the fact that Christ died for sinners. This is not a jot better than the faith of devils. They know who Jesus is. “They believe,” and they do more, “they tremble.” (James ii. 19.)

True saving faith is *an act of the whole inner man*. It is an act of the head, heart, and will, all united and combined. It is an act of the soul, in which,-seeing his own guilt, danger, and hopelessness, -and seeing at the same time Christ offering to save him, a man ventures

on Christ, -flees to Christ, - receives Christ as his only hope, -and becomes a willing dependant on Him for salvation. It is an act which becomes at once the parent of a habit. He that has it may not always be equally sensible of his own faith; but in the main he lives by faith, and walks by faith.

True faith has *nothing of merit* about it, and in the highest sense cannot be called a “work.” It is but laying hold of a Saviour’s hand, leaning on a husband’s arm, and receiving a physician’s medicine. It brings with it nothing to Christ but a sinful man’s soul. It gives nothing, contributes nothing, pays nothing, performs nothing. It only receives, takes, accepts, grasps, and embraces the glorious gift of justification which Christ bestows, and by renewed daily acts enjoys that gift.”<sup>(16)</sup>

In the above passage, our evangelical champion corrects serious errors about faith. He will not allow formalism as a substitute for faith, nor a Sandemanian mental assent. Equally abhorrent is the superficial emotional response (becoming increasingly frequent in the “revival” meetings of the second half of the nineteenth century). Ryle also rejects the idea that faith is itself a meritorious work to be rewarded. And his insistence that faith is an “act of the whole inner man”<sup>(17)</sup> flows from his understanding of regeneration as a change of the whole inner man.<sup>(18)</sup>

## 6 CONCLUSION

A study of Ryle's treatment of Faith and Justification, a subject that was clearly dear to his heart as a pastor, reveals a sureness of touch that is endemic to all his writings about experimental Christianity. When discoursing on Election, Ryle lacks this fullness and sureness, but as soon as he is working in an area where his pastor's heart is engaged, all his experience and evangelistic warmth give him eloquence and persuasive power.



## Part 6 The Application of the Work of Redemption

### Chapter 22

#### ASSURANCE OF GRACE

“...such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may in this life, be certainly assured that they are in a state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed.” (1)

“...the godly consideration of...our election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ...”(2)

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of Assurance of Grace is characteristic of evangelical religion. Although some have held that assurance belongs to the essence of faith - this was definitely the view of the Reformers, and appears to be the standpoint of the Heidelberg Catechism - others have taught that it belongs rather to the *bene esse* of faith.<sup>(3)</sup> What is certain, however, is that the doctrine has been held consistently by evangelicals, and is one of the distinguishing marks of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England. Bishop Ryle holds to the doctrine firmly, though denying that it belongs to the essence of faith. He says quite unequivocally: “A person may have saving faith in Christ, and yet never

enjoy an assured hope, such as the apostle Paul enjoyed. All God's children have faith; not all have assurance. I think this ought never to be forgotten."<sup>(4)</sup> His major exposition of the doctrine is to be found in his book '*Holiness*'; where he devotes a lengthy chapter to the subject.<sup>(5)</sup>

## 2 THE DOCTRINE OF ASSURANCE DEFINED

As usual, Ryle sets out his definition in broad, straightforward and practical terms designed to teach plainly, with a minimum of "technical" language, the doctrine he holds.

"I lay it down fully and broadly, as God's truth, that a true Christian, a converted man, may reach such a comfortable degree of faith in Christ, that in general he shall feel entirely confident as to the pardon and safety of his soul - shall seldom be troubled with doubts - seldom be distracted with fears - seldom be distressed by anxious questionings - and, in short, though vexed by many an inward conflict with sin, shall look forward to death without trembling, and to judgment without dismay. This, I say, is the doctrine of the Bible."<sup>(6)</sup>

As Bishop Ryle develops his exposition of the doctrine largely in response to the opposition to it, we will keep our comments at this point to a minimum. It is evident that the bishop does not regard the assurance as *absolute* - the qualifying expressions, "in general" and "seldom" preclude such an interpretation. At the same time, the identical expressions point to a *substantial* degree of assurance, to the extent that the awareness of death and judgment do not disturb the believer's spiritual equanimity. Again, true

assurance is restricted to the “converted man”, not to the mere professor of religion. With these preliminary observations we move on.

### **3 OPPOSITION TO THE DOCTRINE OF ASSURANCE**

Ryle divides opponents of the doctrine into three classes; the Church of Rome, (and presumably Romanising elements in the Church of England); another group whom he calls “worldly and thoughtless Christians”<sup>(7)</sup>, and a third class, true believers who shrink from the doctrine as leading to presumption.

#### **3.1 The Opposition of Rome**

The Roman Catholic Church, in the Decrees of the Council of Trent, repudiates the possibility of Assurance of Grace in the clearest terms:

“For as no pious person ought to doubt the mercy of God, the merit of Christ and the virtue and efficacy of the sacraments, so each one, when he considers himself and his own weakness and indisposition, may have fear and apprehension concerning his own grace, since *no one can know with the certainty of faith, which cannot be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God.*”<sup>(8)</sup>

Ryle was well aware of this repudiation by Rome, commenting as follows:

“The Church of Rome denounces assurance in the most unmeasured terms. The Council of Trent declares roundly that a “believer’s assurance of the pardon of his sins is a vain and ungodly confidence;” and Cardinal Bellarmine, the well-known champion of Romanism, calls it “a prime error of heretics.””<sup>(9)</sup>

### 3.2 The Opposition of “Worldly” Christians

About this group the evangelical champion is particularly scornful:

“The vast majority of the worldly and thoughtless Christians among ourselves oppose the doctrine of assurance. It offends and annoys them to hear of it. They do not like others to feel comfortable and sure, because they never feel so themselves. Ask them whether their sins are forgiven, and they will probably tell you they do not know! That *they* cannot receive the doctrine of assurance is certainly no marvel.”<sup>(10)</sup>

Ryle’s particularly astringent language at this point is worthy of comment. We do not know the full circumstances of the background to his book on “*Holiness*” but the expression “among ourselves” suggests persons formally espousing the evangelical position, while “worldly and thoughtless” gives the impression that they were unworthy of the name “evangelical.” Had the good rector had a recent experience of the hostility he mentions?

### 3.3 The Opposition of those Concerned about Presumption

These opponents were clearly of most concern, for Ryle devotes much space to answering their objections. He describes these objectors thus:

“...there are also some true believers who reject assurance, or shrink from it as a doctrine fraught with danger. They consider it borders on presumption. They seem to think it a proper humility never to feel sure, never to be confident, and to live in a certain degree of doubt and suspense about their souls. This is to be regretted and does much harm.”<sup>(11)</sup>

Of course, the charge of presumption is substantially the same as that made by Rome against the doctrine of assurance, and Ryle's response will cover both sets of objectors.

#### **4 DEFENDING THE DOCTRINE OF ASSURANCE**

The evangelical defence of the doctrine of assurance that the bishop presents, first of all argues that the abuse of the truth by the presumptuous does not invalidate the truth; it then goes on to show that true assurance was the experience of the saints in Scripture, and has been the experience of many since those days, even up to the present. Lastly, the defence points out that confidence in God's promise is not presumption.

##### **4.1 Abuse of a Truth not Invalidation**

“I frankly allow that there are some *presumptuous* persons who profess to feel a confidence for which they have no scriptural warrant. There are always some people who think well of themselves when God thinks ill, just as there are some who think ill of themselves when God thinks well. There always will be such. There never yet was a Scriptural truth without abuses and counterfeits. God's election - man's impotence -salvation by grace - all are alike abused. There will be fanatics and enthusiasts as long as the world stands. But, for all this, assurance is a reality and a true thing; and God's children must not let themselves be driven from the use of a truth, merely because it is abused.”<sup>(12)</sup>

This defence needs no comment; it is surely axiomatic to any argument that abuse of a truth does not invalidate it.

## 4.2 Assurance a Truth Grounded in Scripture

As ever, our defender of the faith points his readers to the Word of God. We quote just a few of the instances that he cites:

“My answer to all who deny the existence of real, well-grounded assurance, is simply this - What saith the Scripture? If assurance be not there, I have not another word to say.

But does not Job say, “I *know* that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.”? (Job xix, 25-26.)

Does not David say, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, *I will fear no evil*: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me”? (Psalm xxiii. 4.)

Does not Isaiah say, “Thou wilt keep him in *perfect peace* whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee”? (Isaiah xxvi. 3.)...

Does not Paul say to the Romans, “I am *persuaded* that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”? (Rom.viii. 38,39.)...

And again, [to the Corinthians], “We are always *confident*, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.” (2 Cor. v.6.)

Does he not say to Timothy, “I *know* whom I have believed, and am *persuaded* that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him”? (2 Tim.i.12.)...

Does not Peter say expressly, “Give diligence to make your calling and election *sure*”? (2 Peter i.10.)

Does not John say, “We *know* that we have passed from death unto life”? (I John iii.14.)...

What shall we say to these things? I desire to speak with all humility on any controverted point. I feel that I am only a poor fallible child of Adam myself. But I must say that in the passages I have just quoted I see something far higher than the mere “hopes” and “trusts,” with which so many believers appear content in this day. I see the language of persuasion, confidence, knowledge - nay, I may almost say, of certainty. And I feel, for my own part, if I may take these Scriptures in their plain obvious meaning, *the doctrine of assurance is true...*

But my answer, furthermore, to all who dislike the doctrine of assurance, as bordering on presumption, is this: -It can hardly be presumption to tread in the steps of Peter, and Paul, of Job, and of John. They were all eminently humble and lowly-minded men, if

ever any were; and yet they all speak of their own state with an assured hope. Surely this should teach us that deep humility and strong assurance are perfectly compatible, and that there is not any necessary connection between spiritual confidence and pride.’<sup>(13)</sup>

As we mentioned, we have not quoted from all Ryle’s biblical texts, but we may say that they are not merely proof-texts; most of them bear on Christian confidence in adversity. Job speaks in his extremity; David has before him the prospect of the dark valley; Isaiah writes in the context of the Assyrian (or possibly Babylonian) threat to Judah. Paul has before him, in every instance quoted, trials, afflictions, and death itself. Of the quotations from the Petrine and Johannine epistles, we may say that Peter is writing in a context of the pursuit of holiness giving subjective grounds for assurance, while John is highlighting the difference between the world’s hatred and the Christians’ love as a basis for knowing that one has everlasting life.

### **4.3 Assurance the Experience of Christians to the Present Day**

Ryle will not have it that the doctrine belongs to the past, to peculiarly biblical times. He affirms:

“My answer, furthermore, is that many have attained to such an assured hope as our text expresses, even in modern times. I will not concede for a moment that it was a peculiar privilege confined to the Apostolic day. There have been in our own land many believers, who have appeared to walk in almost uninterrupted fellowship with the Father and the Son - who have seemed to enjoy an almost unceasing sense of the light of God’s reconciled countenance



shining down upon them, and have left their experience on record. I could mention well-known names, if space permitted. The thing has been, and is - and that is enough.”<sup>(14)</sup>

#### **4.4 Confidence in the Divine Promise, not Presumption**

Ryle now explains that assurance of grace is by no means an act of presumption - it is simply the result of a mature faith. To let him speak for himself:

“My answer, lastly, is, It cannot be wrong to feel confidently in a matter where God speaks unconditionally - to believe decidedly when God promises decidedly - to have a sure persuasion of pardon and peace when we rest on the word and oath of Him that never changes. It is an utter mistake to suppose that the believer who feels assurance is resting on anything he sees in himself. He simply leans on the Mediator of the New Covenant, and the Scripture of truth. He believes the Lord Jesus means what He says, and takes Him at His word. *Assurance after all is no more than a fullgrown faith; a masculine faith that grasps Christ’s promise with both hands - a faith that argues like the good centurion, If the Lord “speak the word only,” I am healed. Wherefore then should I doubt? (Matt. viii. 8.)*”<sup>(15)</sup>

Assurance, then, is faith resting on the Person and Promise of God in Christ. It is the spirit evidenced in the General Confession: “..Restore thou them that are penitent, according to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord.”<sup>(16)</sup> However, our epitome of Anglican Evangelicalism is not content

with stating the biblical principle; he seeks to expound it in the experience of his great hero, the apostle Paul:

“We may be sure that Paul was the last man in the world to build his assurance on anything of his own. He who could write himself down “chief of sinners” (I Tim. i.15), had a deep sense of his guilt and corruption. But he had a still deeper sense of the length and breadth of Christ’s righteousness imputed to him. - He who could cry, “O wretched man that I am” (Rom. vii.24), had a clear view of the fountain of evil within his heart. But then he had a still clearer view of that other Fountain which can remove “all sin and uncleanness.”...Paul knew, if ever man did, that he was a poor, frail bark, floating on a stormy ocean. He saw, if any did, the rolling waves and roaring tempest by which he was surrounded. But then he looked away from self to Jesus, and was not afraid. He remembered that anchor within the veil, which is both “sure and steadfast.” (Heb. vi.19.) He remembered the word, and work, and constant intercession of Him that loved him and gave Himself for him. And this it was, and nothing else, that enabled him to say so boldly, “A crown is laid up for me, and the Lord shall give it to me;” and to conclude so surely, “The Lord will preserve me; I shall never be confounded.”<sup>(17)</sup>

It is the writer’s increasing conviction that in J.C.Ryle’s exposition of the great doctrines of the faith we have a manner of presentation that not only convinces, but that also grips with a sense of the importance of the issue

under review. We are made to *see* Paul, to *feel* his struggle, and his triumph. And we are persuaded that we can experience, *should* experience that triumph ourselves. Ryle's conclusion of this part of his exposition is surely a masterpiece of understatement: "I think it will be allowed I have shown some good ground for the assertion I made, that assurance is a true thing."<sup>(18)</sup>

## **5 ASSURANCE AND THE ESSENCE OF SAVING FAITH**

As we noted earlier, Ryle did not believe that assurance belonged to the essence of saving faith. In expounding this, he allows that other worthier men, "at whose feet" he confesses, "I would gladly sit,"<sup>(19)</sup> do not allow the distinction between saving faith and assurance, but he regards their view as being "a most uncomfortable gospel to preach, and one very likely to keep souls back a long time from the gate of life."<sup>(20)</sup>

### **5.1 The Distinction between Faith and Assurance Stated**

As usual, having adopted a position, the bishop is straight-forward in presenting it:

"I do not shrink from saying that by grace a man may have sufficient faith to flee to Christ; sufficient faith really to lay hold on Him - really to trust in Him -really to be a child of God - really to be saved; and yet to his last day be never free from much anxiety, doubt and fear."<sup>(21)</sup>

### **5.2 The Distinction between Faith and Assurance Expounded**

Ryle's method in expounding the distinction he has indicated is interesting. He refers to different events, different acts, different affirmations in Scripture and

indicates that they clearly show a difference between the two graces. Three of his examples must suffice:

“Faith is that poor trembling woman who came behind Jesus in the press, and touched the hem of His garment. (Mark v.25.) Assurance is Stephen standing calmly in the midst of his murderers, and saying, “I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.” (Acts vii.56.)

Faith is Peter’s drowning cry, as he began to sink: “Lord save me!” (Matt.xiv. 30.) Assurance is that same Peter declaring before the Council in after times, “This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Actsiv.11,12.)...

Faith is Saul praying in the house of Judas at Damascus, sorrowful, blind, and alone. (Acts ix.11.) Assurance is Paul, the aged prisoner, looking calmly into the grave, and saying, “I know whom I have believed. There is a crown of life laid up for me.” (2 Tim.i.12; iv.8.)(<sup>22</sup>)

It may be that Ryle’s illustrations are not finally convincing; but they are certainly telling, and must give pause to the most earnest champion of the contrary view. However, the present writer would suggest that the bishop’s view is determined in large measure by pastoral experience. All of us who

have engaged for any length of time in a parish ministry have met with individuals who show much of the work of grace in their hearts, but who lack assurance of salvation. We cannot deny that work, nor can we deny their little faith. The solution lies in the distinction Ryle has indicated, and for us his argument from the scriptural examples is satisfying and compelling.

Of course, not content with making the distinction, he presses on his readers the need to seek assurance, and not to rest in a state of “little faith.” He also expatiates on the value of assurance in the Christian life, but that, strictly speaking, falls outside the scope of this study. Ryle as a pastor, would make a fascinating study on its own!

## **6 CONCLUSION**

Once again, we see in Ryle’s exposition of assurance, the wonderful blend of teacher and pastor, ever concerned for soundness in the faith, that there might be soundness in the life, and seeking that soundness in a faithful setting forth of the message of God’s holy Word.

## Part 6 The Application of the Work of Redemption

### Chapters 23-25 SANCTIFICATION

#### Chapter 23

#### FALSE VIEWS OF SANCTIFICATION

“Wherefore they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God [Predestination to life],...be made like the image of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works: and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.”<sup>(1)</sup>

“They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them: the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”<sup>(2)</sup>

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

Perhaps no doctrine occupied such a large place in the heart of John Charles Ryle as did sanctification. His substantial book, “*Holiness*” consists of papers relating to the subject. The doctrine is clearly expounded, and closely applied to the conscience in his writings. Our survey deals only with four aspects of his teaching, namely, refuting false views of the doctrine, the nature of sanctification, the true marks of it, and the way in which justification and sanctification relate to one another.

## 2 THE IMPORTANCE OF SANCTIFICATION

The reason for the high place that Sanctification holds in Ryle's theology is to be found in his paper "Evangelical Religion" in his book *"Knots Untied."*<sup>(3)</sup>

We shall let him explain for himself:

*"The fifth and last leading feature in Evangelical Religion is the importance which it attaches to the outward and visible work of the Holy Ghost in the life of man.*

Its theory is that the true grace of God is a thing which will always make itself manifest in the conduct, behaviour, tastes, ways, choices, and habits of him who has it. It is not a *dormant* thing, that can be within a man and not show itself...Where the Spirit is, He will always make His presence known...

We maintain that to tell a man he is "born of God," or regenerated, while he is living in carelessness or sin, is a dangerous delusion, and calculated to do infinite mischief to his soul. We affirm confidently that "fruit" is the only certain evidence of a man's spiritual condition; that if we would know whose he is and whom he serves, we must look first at his life. Where there is the grace of the Spirit there will be always more or less fruit of the Spirit. Grace that cannot be seen is no grace at all, and nothing better than Antinomianism. Note, in short, we believe that where there is nothing seen, there is nothing possessed."<sup>(4)</sup>

To put it plainly, the truth of sanctification is vital to theology because its presence is vital to a person's salvation. That being the case, we can

understand why a great evangelical would give much thought and time and space to this great truth.

### **3 REFUTATION OF FALSE VIEWS OF SANCTIFICATION**

As we intimated in our introduction to this thesis, Ryle can often be seen, in his works, to be responding to his theological environment. Nowhere is this more true than in this area of his theology, and there are at least three views of sanctification that he felt it necessary to refute as unbiblical and dangerous.

#### **3.1 Baptismal Regeneration and “Dormant” Sanctification**

We will have noted Ryle’s cryptic reference to the chimera of a dormant sanctification in people who show no signs of the Spirit’s work. The explanation of this expression is found in his paper on Baptism, also found in *“Knots Untied.”*<sup>(5)</sup> Writing of those who teach baptismal regeneration, or, as he expresses it, “those Churchmen who maintain that grace invariably accompanies baptism, and that all baptized infants are in baptism born again,”<sup>(6)</sup> he affirms:

“They help forward the perilous and soul-ruining delusion that a man may have grace in his heart, while it cannot be seen in his life. Multitudes of our worshippers have not a spark of religious life or grace about them. And yet we are told that they must all be addressed as regenerate, or possessors of grace, because they have been baptized! Surely this is dangerous!”<sup>(7)</sup>

Because the sacramentarian is faced with the anomaly of a regeneration that is not evident, he is driven to the desperate shift of averring that the grace is



truly present, but “dormant”! In the light of this, Ryle felt bound to expound sanctification in such a way as to repudiate this error.

### 3.2 The “Holiness” Movement and “Sinless Perfection”

During the eighth decade of the nineteenth century, a movement with the laudable aim of “the promotion of Scriptural holiness”<sup>(8)</sup> sprang up under the leadership of an American Quaker, Robert Pearsall Smith, and propagated teachings that seemed to border on “Sinless Perfection.” Before long, scandal attached to the movement, due to what Marcus Loane euphemistically calls Pearsall Smith’s, “lack of mental and moral stability,”<sup>(9)</sup> and Ryle’s worst fears of fanatical extremism and its consequences seemed to have been realised.

This movement, which, under wiser leadership developed into the very respectable “Keswick” movement, was influential in evangelical circles, and there can be little doubt that its distinctive earlier tenets were in view when Ryle wrote his introductory chapter to “Holiness,” and the chapter on “Sin” in the same volume. To obtain some idea of what these notions of perfection were, we quote from the latter chapter.

“...a right view of sin is one of the *best antidotes to the overstrained theories of Perfection*, of which we hear so much in these times....if men really mean to tell us that here in this world a believer can attain to entire freedom from sin, live for years in unbroken and uninterrupted communion with God, and feel for months together not so much as one evil thought, I must honestly say that such an opinion appears to me very *unscriptural*. -I go even further. I say

that the opinion is very dangerous to him that holds it, and very likely to depress, discourage, and keep back inquirers after salvation. I cannot find the slightest warrant in God's Word for expecting such perfection as this while we are in the body."<sup>(10)</sup>

The tone of these comments is very severe, which gives us some idea of how strongly the bishop felt about the matter. No less strong is his language in the introductory chapter:

"...I must protest against the language used in many quarters, in these last days, about *perfection*. I must think that those who use it either know very little of the nature of sin, or of the attributes of God, or of their own hearts, or of the Bible, or of the meaning of words. When a professing Christian coolly tells me that he has got beyond such hymns as "*Just as I am*", and that they are below his present experience, though they suited him when he first took up religion, I must think his soul is in a very unhealthy state."<sup>(11)</sup>

Actually, Ryle gives a penetrating analysis and critique of many of the facets of the contemporary "Holiness" teaching which well repay careful study, and which show his acuity as to theological trends among evangelicals. Only the exigencies of space preclude a detailed study here.

### **3.3 Anglo-Catholicism**

The increasingly influential Anglo-Catholic Movement within the Church of England emphasised two aspects of religious life that the movement believed were important to, and evidence of, sanctification. These were a multiplicity of

external acts of devotion, and, for some, a form of monasticism.

In his admittedly extremely polemical work, “*The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*”, Walter Walsh describes some of their rituals that purportedly are means of sanctification, such as the Adoration of the Cross<sup>(12)</sup>, and Confession<sup>(13)</sup>. He also records the comments of Dr. Pusey, [leader of the Ritualistic Party] about monasticism, to the effect that “it would be a great blessing to the church.”<sup>(14)</sup> To these ideas, Ryle was unalterably opposed. As he says in his chapter “Sanctification”:

“True sanctification does not consist in *outward formalism* and external devoutness. This is an enormous delusion, but unhappily a very common one. Thousands appear to imagine that true holiness is to be seen in an excessive quantity of bodily religion - in constant attendance on Church services, reception of the Lord’s Supper, and observance of fasts and saints’ days - in multiplied bowings and turnings and gestures and postures during public worship - in self-imposed austerities and petty self-denials - in wearing peculiar dresses, and the use of pictures and crosses...I am afraid that in many cases this external *religiousness* is made a substitute for inward holiness; and I am quite certain that it falls utterly short of sanctification of heart....

Sanctification does not consist in *retirement from our place in life* and the renunciation of our social duties. In every age it has been a snare with many to take up this line in the pursuit of holiness. Hundreds of hermits have buried themselves in some wilderness,

and thousands of men and women have shut themselves up within the walls of monasteries and convents, under the vain idea that by doing so they would escape sin and become eminently holy. They have forgotten that no bolts and bars can keep out the devil, and that wherever we go, we carry that root of all evil, our own hearts. To become a monk, or a nun, or to join a House of Mercy, [a reference to the House for the Sisters of Mercy, which had Dr. Pusey as its “Spiritual Director” ], is not the high road to sanctification. True holiness does not make a Christian evade difficulties, but face and overcome them. Christ would have His people show that His grace is not a mere hot-house plant, which can only thrive under shelter, but a strong, hardy thing which can flourish in every relation of life. It is doing our duty in that state to which God has called us - like salt in the midst of corruption, and light in the midst of darkness - which is a primary element in sanctification.”<sup>(15)</sup>

Ryle’s sturdy protestantism is very evident in this polemic, and his strictures against the asceticism and ritualism being brought into the Established Church are of a piece with his overall dislike of everything that smacked of Rome. At the same time, one is delighted to see, almost incidentally, that the evangelical is also not narrowly pietistic in his view of sanctification - for him, monastic practices are not merely “popish”, they are a contradiction of the Christian’s calling in the world.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

We have surveyed, briefly, Ryle's interaction with diverse contemporary views of sanctification. We find him severe in his criticisms; his severity is born of concern for the purity of the gospel, and the welfare of the flock. We now turn to a consideration of his positive exposition of the nature of true sanctification.

## Part 6 The Application of the Work of Redemption

### Chapter 23-25 SANCTIFICATION

## Chapter 24

# THE NATURE OF SANCTIFICATION

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In his treatment of the subject of the nature of sanctification Ryle follows a characteristic pattern in setting out a general definition, and then giving a detailed and practical exposition. We shall best understand this evangelical leader's understanding of the subject by allowing him to make his own emphases, so our quotations, while being extensive, will seek to give due proportion to his arguments, in keeping with the place that he gives to them.

## 2 GENERAL DEFINITION OF SANCTIFICATION

Because it colours his whole exposition, we will give the bishop's own general definition in full.

“Sanctification is that inward spiritual work which the Lord Jesus Christ works in a man by the Holy Ghost, when He calls him to be a true believer. He not only washes him from his sins in His own blood, but He also separates him from his natural love of sin and the world, puts a new principle in his heart, and makes him practically godly in life. The instrument by which the Spirit effects this work is generally the Word of God, though He sometimes uses afflictions and providential visitations “without the Word.” (I Peter iii.1.) The

subject of this work of Christ by His Spirit is called in Scripture a  
“sanctified” man.”<sup>(1)</sup>

The definition is of course unexceptional in its content, but we note the way that Ryle insists that Christ, as part of His saving work, *and not merely in addition to it*, sanctifies as well as forgives. That this concept is not accidental in the bishop’s definition is clear from a closely-following comment:

“The Lord Jesus has undertaken everything that His people’s souls require; not only to deliver them from the *guilt* of their sins by His atoning death, but from the *dominion* of their sins, by placing in their hearts the Holy Spirit; not only to justify them but to sanctify them.”<sup>(2)</sup>

Ryle’s development of his definition beyond the original definition is necessitated, according to his own words, because “a doctrine which is needful to salvation can never be too sharply developed, or brought too fully into light.”<sup>(3)</sup> He makes this development in twelve propositions, which fall, in the writer’s view into a few categories. The first of these is what may be called the *evidential* category, that is, the work of sanctification viewed as evidence of the reality of grace.

### **3 THE EVIDENTIAL CHARACTER OF SANCTIFICATION**

#### **3.1 Sanctification Evidence of Union with Christ**

“Sanctification, then, is the invariable result of that vital *union with* Christ which true faith gives to a Christian. - “He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.” (John xv. 5.)

The branch which bears no fruit is no living branch of the vine. The union with Christ which produces no effect on heart and life is a mere formal union, which is worthless before God....In short, where there is no sanctification of life, there is no real faith in Christ.”<sup>(4)</sup>

### **3.2 Sanctification and Regeneration**

“Sanctification, again, is the *outcome and inseparable consequence of regeneration*. He that is born again and made a new creature, receives a new nature and a new principle, and always leads a new life. A regeneration which a man can have, and yet live carelessly in sin, or worldliness, is a regeneration invented by uninspired theologians, but never mentioned in Scripture. On the contrary, St. John expressly says, that “He that is born of God doth not commit sin - doeth righteousness - loveth the brethren - keepeth himself - and overcometh the world.” (I John ii.29; iii.9-14; v.4-18.) In a word, where there is no sanctification there is no regeneration, and where there is no holy life there is no new birth. This is, no doubt, a hard saying to many minds; but, hard or not, it is simple Bible truth.”<sup>(5)</sup>

### **3.3 Sanctification and the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit**

“Sanctification, again, is the only certain *evidence of that indwelling of the Holy Spirit* which is essential to salvation. “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.” (Rom. viii. 9.) The Spirit never lies dormant and idle within the soul: He always makes His presence known by the fruit He causes to borne in heart,



character, and life. “The fruit of the Spirit,” says St.Paul, “Is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,” and such like. (Gal. v. 22.) Where these things are found, there is the Spirit: where these things are wanting, men are dead before God...We may depend on it as a positive certainty, that where there is no holy living, there is no Holy Ghost. The seal that the Spirit stamps on Christ’s people is sanctification.”<sup>(6)</sup>

### **3.4 Sanctification and Election**

“Sanctification, again, is the *only sure mark of God’s election*. The names and number of the elect are a secret thing, no doubt, which God has wisely kept in His own power, and not revealed to man...But if there is one thing clearly and plainly laid down about election, it is this - that elect men and women may be known and distinguished by holy lives. It is expressly written that they are “elect through sanctification - chosen unto salvation through sanctification - predestinated to be conformed to the image of God’s Son - and chosen in Christ...that they should be holy.” - Hence, when St.Paul saw the working “faith” and labouring “love” and patient “hope” of the Thessalonian believers, he says, “I know your election of God.” (I Peter i.2; II Thess.ii.13; Rom. viii. 39; Eph. i.4; I Thess.i.3,4.) He that boasts of being one of God’s elect, while he is wilfully and habitually living in sin, is only deceiving himself, and talking wicked blasphemy...where there is not, at least,

some appearance of sanctification, we may be quite certain there is no election.’’(7)

The point that Ryle is making in these four pictures is important. It is all too easy to speak of the evangelical blessings of calling, and union with Christ and the new birth, and the power of the Spirit - in our day as well as his - and at the same time deceive ourselves as to the reality of these blessings demonstrated in genuinely Christian lives. As the bishop later points out, “true sanctification does not consist in *talk about religion*.”(8) If we are really in possession of these blessings, they will most certainly evidence themselves in holiness.

There is another category of truths about the nature of sanctification that Ryle expounds; we may denominate these the dynamic character of sanctification.

#### **4 THE DYNAMIC CHARACTER OF SANCTIFICATION**

Unlike sacramentalism, which makes so much of Christianity almost mechanical, evangelicalism views Christianity as truly dynamic in its progress - it develops through communication, effort and conflict, and the regenerate person co-operates in his sanctification.

##### **4.1 Sanctification and Responsibility**

“...I maintain that believers are eminently and peculiarly responsible, and under a special obligation to live holy lives. They are not as others, dead and blind and unrenewed: they are alive unto God, and have light and knowledge, and a new principle within them. Whose fault is it if they are not holy, but their own?...God, who has

given them grace and a new heart, and a new nature, has deprived them of all excuse if they do not live for His praise....A man who professes to be a true Christian, while he sits still, content with a very low degree of sanctification...and coolly tells you he “can do nothing,” is a very pitiable sight, and a very ignorant man. Against this delusion let us watch and be on our guard. The Word of God always addresses its precepts to believers as accountable and responsible beings. If the Saviour of sinners gives us renewing grace, and calls us by His Spirit, we may be sure that He expects us to use our grace, and not to go to sleep.”<sup>(9)</sup>

#### **4.2 Sanctification and Growth**

“Sanctification, again, is *a thing which admits of growth and degrees*. A man may climb from one step to another in holiness, and be far more sanctified at one period of his life than another. More pardoned and more justified...he cannot be, though he may feel it more. More sanctified he certainly may be, because every grace in his new character may be strengthened, enlarged, and deepened. This is the evident meaning of our Lord’s last prayer for His disciples, when He used the words, “Sanctify them”; and of St.Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonians, “The very God of peace sanctify you.” (John xvii. 17; I Thess. iv.3.) In both cases the expression plainly implies the possibility of increased sanctification; while such an expression as “justify them” is never once in Scripture applied to a believer, because he cannot be more justified

than he is. I can find no warrant in Scripture for the doctrine of “imputed sanctification.” It is a doctrine which seems to me to confuse things that differ, and to lead to very evil consequences. Not least, it is a doctrine which is flatly contradicted by the experience of all the most eminent Christians. If there is any point on which God’s holiest saints agree it is this: that they see more, and know more, and feel more, and do more, and repent more, and believe more, as they get on in spiritual life, and in proportion to the closeness of their walk with God. In short, they “grow in grace,” as St.Peter exhorts believers to do; and “abound more and more,” according to the words of St.Paul. (2 Pet. iii. 18; I Thess. iv. 1.)”<sup>(10)</sup>

We feel it is necessary, at this point, to interact with Ryle on the issue of “imputed sanctification.” The idea seems to have been used by certain of the “Holiness” preachers in a context of passivity in sanctification, and we would certainly agree with the bishop as to the error in this concept. However, as Professor John Murray has shown, there is such a thing as “definitive sanctification”, described by Murray as “a decisive and definitive breach with the power and service of sin in the case of every one who has come under the control of the provisions of grace.”<sup>(11)</sup> Of course, Murray is careful to show that this is not sinless perfection and that there is also the balancing truth of “progressive sanctification.”<sup>(12)</sup> Nevertheless, it does indicate that Ryle should have been alerted by the claims of his contemporaries, and investigated the correct doctrine to be drawn from the texts concerned rather than being too easily dismissive. In fact, this is perhaps an illustration of how Ryle’s

traditional evangelicalism, and his indebtedness to the Puritans, so often a strength in his writings, could sometimes prove to be a hindrance to his moving forward in spiritual understanding.

#### **4.3 Sanctification and the Use of the Means of Grace**

“Sanctification, again, is *a thing which depends greatly on a diligent use of Scriptural means*. When I speak of “means”, I have in view Bible-reading, private prayer, regular attendance on public worship, regular hearing of God’s Word, and regular reception of the Lord’s Supper. I lay it down as a simple matter of fact, that no one who is careless about such things must ever expect to make much progress in sanctification....They are appointed channels through which the Holy Spirit conveys fresh supplies of grace to the soul, and strengthens the work which He has begun in the inward man. Let men call this legal doctrine if they please, but I will never shrink from declaring my belief that there are no “spiritual gains without pains.”...Our God is a God who works by means, and He will never bless the soul of that man who pretends to be so high and spiritual that he can get on without them.”<sup>(13)</sup>

#### **4.4 Sanctification and Conflict**

“Sanctification, again, is *a thing which does not prevent a man having a great deal of inward spiritual conflict*. By conflict I mean a struggle within the heart between the old nature and the new, the flesh and the spirit, which are to be found together in every believer. (Gal.v. 17.) A deep sense of that struggle and a vast amount of

mental discomfort from it, are no proof that a man is not sanctified. Nay, rather, I believe they are healthy symptoms of our condition, and prove that we are not dead, but alive. A true Christian is one who has not only peace of conscience, but war within. He may be known by his warfare as well as by his peace... I believe that what I say is confirmed by the language of St. Paul in the seventh chapter of Romans. That chapter I commend to the careful study of all my readers. I am quite satisfied that it does not describe the experience of an unconverted man, or of a young and unestablished Christian; but of an old experienced saint in close communion with God. None but such a man could say, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." (Rom. vii. 22.) I believe, furthermore, that what I say is proved by the experience of all the most eminent servants of Christ that have ever lived... Believing all this, I shall never hesitate to tell people that inward conflict is no proof that a man is not holy, and that they must not think they are not sanctified because they do not feel entirely free from inward struggle... The heart of the best Christian, even at his best, is a field occupied by two rival camps, and the "company of two armies."... Let the words of the Thirteenth... Article be well considered by all Churchmen: "The infection of nature doth remain in them that are regenerated."<sup>(14)</sup>

In reflecting of the dynamic element in sanctification emphasised by Ryle, it is evident that he is not only biblical, but also realistic, and that his approach is psychologically sound. One of the great difficulties faced by the young

convert is the horror with which he discovers that, despite his new devotion to Christ and his hatred for sin, he appears to make spiritual progress slowly, and with pain. Ryle's exposition helps us to see that such pain and trial are normal and not exceptional. We are therefore encouraged to press on.

It remains for us to examine the third and last category of characteristics of sanctification as described in Ryle's analysis - although the name we give is not entirely satisfactory, we may call it eschatological.

## **5 THE ESCHATOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF SANCTIFICATION**

### **5.1 Sanctification and the Day of Judgment.**

“Sanctification, again, is a thing which will be found absolutely necessary as *a witness to our character in the great day of judgment*. It will be utterly useless to plead that we believed in Christ, unless our faith has had some sanctifying effect, and been seen in our lives. Evidence, evidence, evidence,[sic!] will be the one thing wanted when the great white throne is set...when the dead are arraigned before the bar of God...The question will not be how we talked and what we professed, but how we lived and what we did. Let no man deceive himself on this point. If anything is certain about the future, it is certain that there will be a judgment; if anything is certain about judgment, it is certain that men's “works and doings” will be considered and examined in it. (John v. 29; 2 Cor.v. 10; Rev. xx.13.) He that supposes that works are of no importance, because they cannot justify us, is a very ignorant Christian. Unless he opens his

eyes, he will find to his cost that if he comes to the bar of God without some evidence of grace, he had better never have been born.”<sup>(15)</sup>

## **5.2 Sanctification and Preparation for Heaven.**

“Sanctification, in the last place, is *absolutely necessary, in order to train and prepare us for heaven*. Most men hope to go to heaven when they die; but few, it may be feared, take the trouble to consider whether they would enjoy heaven if they got there. Heaven is essentially a holy place; its inhabitants are all holy; its occupations are all holy. To be really happy in heaven, it is clear and plain that we must be somewhat trained and made ready for heaven while we are on earth. We must be saints before we die, if we are to be saints afterwards in glory....We need the work of the Holy Spirit as well as the work of Christ; we need renewal of the heart as well as the atoning blood; we need to be sanctified as well as justified....No man can possibly be happy in a place where he is not in his element... when an eagle is happy in an iron cage, when a sheep is happy in the water, when an owl is happy in the blaze of noonday sun,...then, and not till then, will I admit that the unsanctified man could be happy in heaven.”<sup>(16)</sup>



## 6 CONCLUSION

Thus far, then, in our study of Ryle's understanding of the nature of sanctification. Despite one or two weaknesses, in not countering contrary views adequately, the great evangelical champion has set forth the truth about this great doctrine in powerful terms, eminently sane, eminently practical, and, as always, eminently biblical.

## Part 6 The Application of the Work of Redemption

### Chapters 23-25 SANCTIFICATION

## Chapter 25

# THE MARKS OF SANCTIFICATION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO JUSTIFICATION

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Although sanctification is a profoundly spiritual reality, its presence is clearly discernable. Bishop Ryle was careful not to leave the doctrine “up in the air.” He was concerned that his readers should realise that they would be able to know whether this process was operative in their lives. To this end he listed a number of marks of the presence of sanctification in the life of a professing Christian, which he called “visible evidence”.<sup>(1)</sup> These marks are divided into *unacceptable* evidences that may be present without real spiritual life, and *acceptable* evidences that were a sure indication of God at work in His redeemed and regenerate people.

## 2 UNACCEPTABLE EVIDENCE OF SANCTIFICATION

We have already considered two of these counterfeit evidences - outward formalism and monasticism. We therefore direct our attention to two of the others.

### 2.1 Talk about Religion

“True sanctification then does not consist in *talk about religion*.

This is a point which ought never to be forgotten. The vast increase of education and preaching...makes it absolutely necessary to raise a

warning voice. People hear so much of gospel truth that they contract an unholy familiarity with its words and phrases, and sometimes talk so fluently about its doctrines that you might think them true Christians. In fact it is sickening and disgusting to hear the cool and flippant language which may pour out about “conversion -the Saviour - the Gospel - finding peace - free grace”, and the like, while they are notoriously serving sin or living for the world. Can we doubt that such talk is abominable in God’s sight, and is little better than cursing, swearing, and taking God’s name in vain? The tongue is not the only member that Christ bids us give to His service. God does not want His people to be mere empty tubs, sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. We must be sanctified, not only “in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” (I John iii. 18.)<sup>(2)</sup>

## **2.2 Sanctification and Religious Feelings**

“True sanctification does not consist in *temporary religious feelings*. This again is a point about which a warning is greatly needed. Mission services and revival meetings are attracting great attention in every part of the land, and producing a great sensation...these things have their attendant dangers as well as their advantages. Wherever wheat is sown the devil is sure to sow tares. Many, it may be feared, appear moved and touched and roused under the preaching of the Gospel, while in reality their hearts are not changed at all. ...Their wounds are only skin deep, and the peace they profess

to feel is skin deep also. Like the stony-ground hearers, they “receive the Word with joy” (Matt.xiii.20); but after a little they fall away, go back to the world, and are harder and worse than before. Like Jonah’s gourd, they come up suddenly in a night and perish in a night. Let these things not be forgotten. Let us urge on every one who exhibits new interest in religion to be content with nothing short of the deep, solid, sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost...I know of no state of soul more dangerous than to imagine that we are born again and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, because we have picked up a few religious feelings.’’(3)

Seldom do we see Ryle in more devastating vein than in this repudiation of false religion - his anger is greater because the manifestations of which he is writing are found in the evangelical camp. These false converts, with their easy talk and empty lives, with their excited but short-lived emotions, are for this transparently godly preacher of real Christianity almost too much to bear. However, in contrast, there are the real and solid evidences of sanctification that delight the bishop’s pastoral heart, and to these we now turn.

### **3 TRUE EVIDENCE OF SANCTIFICATION**

#### **3.1 Habitual Respect to God’s Law**

“Genuine sanctification will show itself in *habitual respect to God’s law*, and habitual effort to live in obedience to it as the rule of life. There is no greater mistake than to suppose that a Christian has nothing to do with the law and the Ten Commandments, because he cannot be justified by keeping them. The same Holy Ghost who

convinces the believer of sin by the law, and leads him to Christ for justification, will always lead him to a spiritual use of the law, as a friendly guide, in the pursuit of sanctification...He that pretends to be a saint, while he sneers at the Ten Commandments, and thinks nothing of lying, hypocrisy, swindling, ill-temper, slander, drunkenness, and breach of the seventh commandment, is under a fearful delusion. He will find it hard to prove that he is a “saint” in the last day!”<sup>(4)</sup>

### **3.2 Habitual Endeavour to do Christ’s Will**

“Genuine sanctification will show itself in an *habitual endeavour* to do Christ’s will, and to live by His practical precepts. These precepts are to be found scattered everywhere throughout the four Gospels, and especially in the Sermon on the Mount. He that supposes that they were spoken without the intention of promoting holiness, and that a Christian need not attend to them in his daily life, is really little better than a lunatic, and at any rate is a grossly ignorant person. To hear some men talk, and read some men’s writings, one might imagine that our blessed Lord, when He was on earth, never taught anything but *doctrine*, and left practical duties to be taught by others! The slightest knowledge of the four Gospels ought to tell us that this is a complete mistake. What His disciples ought to be and do is continually brought forward in our Lord’s teaching. A truly sanctified man will never forget this. He serves a

Master who said, “Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.” (John xv.14.)”<sup>(5)</sup>

### **3.3 Habitual Endeavour to Uphold Pauline Ethical Standards**

“Genuine sanctification will show itself in an habitual desire to live up to *the standard which St.Paul sets before the Churches* in his writings....The common idea of many persons that St.Paul’s writings are full of nothing but doctrinal statements and controversial subjects...is an entire delusion, and a melancholy proof of the ignorance of Scripture which prevails in these latter days. I defy anyone to read St.Paul’s writings carefully without finding in them a large quantity of plain, practical directions about the Christian’s duty in every relation of life, and about our daily habits, temper, and behaviour to one another...He who does not attend to them may possibly pass muster as a member of a church or a chapel, but he certainly is not what the Bible calls a “sanctified” man.”<sup>(6)</sup>

### **3.4 Habitual Imitation of the Example of Christ**

“Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual *attention to the active graces* which our Lord so beautifully exemplified, and especially to the grace of charity...A sanctified man will try to do good in the world, and to lessen the sorrow and increase the happiness of all around him. He will aim to be like his Master, full of kindness and love to every one, and this not in word only, ...but by deeds and actions and self-denying work, according as he has opportunity... Christ will never be found the Saviour of those who

know nothing of following His example. Saving faith and real converting grace will always produce some conformity to the image of Jesus. (Coloss. iii.10.)

Genuine sanctification...will show itself in *habitual attention to the passive graces* of Christianity. When I speak of passive graces, I mean those graces which are especially shown in submission to the will of God, and in bearing and forbearing towards one another. Few people, perhaps, unless they have examined the point, have an idea how much is said about these graces in the New Testament, and how important a place they seem to fill. [A number of Scriptural examples follow.] I must plainly say that I do not think this subject is sufficiently considered by Christians. The passive graces are no doubt harder to attain than the active ones, but they are precisely the graces which have the greatest influence on the world. Of one thing I feel very sure - it is nonsense to pretend to sanctification unless we follow after the meekness, gentleness, long-suffering, and forgiveness of which the Bible makes so much.’’(7)

This exposition of the positive elements of Christian living that make a claim to sanctification credible is perhaps unsurprising in its content - they are the stock-in trade of all ethical preaching - but Ryle’s presentation must be seen against the background of the antinomianism that was all too prevalent in his day. It is our opinion that his insistence on the passive graces does make an impact, especially as Ryle is so often seen as the epitome of “muscular” Christianity!

All in all, there is an air of solid commonsense about Ryle's exposition of the marks of sanctification - he avoids the slippery slopes of mysticism while leaving us with the awareness that these evidences are indeed "graces."

#### **4 THE RELATIONSHIP OF SANCTIFICATION TO JUSTIFICATION**

In presenting this part of his paper, Ryle is aware that it may seem to be unimportant as relating to "words and names," and as such, as being "of little real value."<sup>(8)</sup> He answers this line of reasoning very firmly: "I warn all who are in earnest about their souls, that the discomfort which arises from not "distinguishing things that differ" in Christian doctrine is very great indeed; and I especially advise them, if they love peace, to seek clear views about the matter."<sup>(9)</sup>

He then proceeds to show in what ways sanctification and justification are alike and in what ways they differ. Without going into all the detail that he does, we will indicate the main thrust of his argument.

##### **4.1 Points of Similarity**

"(a) Both proceed originally from the free grace of God.

(b) Both are part of that great work of salvation which Christ, in the eternal covenant, has under-taken on behalf of His people

(c) Both are to be found in the same persons. Those who are justified are always sanctified...

(d) Both begin at the same time. The moment a person begins to be a justified person, he also begins to be a sanctified person...



(e) Both are alike necessary to salvation. No one ever reached heaven without a renewed heart as well as forgiveness, without the Spirit's grace as well as the blood of Christ..

Such are the points on which justification and sanctification agree.’’(10)

## 4.2 Points of Difference

“(a) Justification is the *reckoning*...a man to be righteous for the sake of...Jesus Christ...

Sanctification is the actual *making* a man inwardly righteous...

(b) The righteousness we have by our justification is *not our own*, but the everlasting perfect righteousness of...Christ, imputed to us, and made our own by faith.

The righteousness we have by sanctification is our own righteousness, imparted...wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, but mingled with much...imperfection.

(c) In justification our own works have no place..and simple faith in Christ is the one thing needful.

In sanctification our own works are of vast importance and God bids us fight, and watch, and pray, and strive, and take pains, and labour.

(d) Justification is a finished and complete work, and a man is perfectly justified the moment he believes.

Sanctification is an imperfect work, comparatively, and will never be perfected until we reach heaven.

(e) Justification admits of no growth or increase: a man is as much justified the hour he first comes to Christ...as he will be to all eternity. Sanctification is eminently a progressive work, and admits of continual growth and enlargement...

(f) Justification has special reference to our *persons*, our standing in God's sight, and our deliverance from guilt.

Sanctification has special reference to our *natures* and the moral renewal of our hearts.

(g) Justification gives us our title to heaven, and boldness to enter in. Sanctification gives us our meetness for heaven...

(h) Justification is an act of God *about* us, and is not easily discerned by others.

Sanctification is the work of God *within* us, and cannot be hid in its outward manifestation from the eyes of men."<sup>(11)</sup>

## 5 CONCLUSION

This whole subject of Sanctification is one which Ryle expounded at great length, and it is difficult to single out any dominating features, beyond the usual ones of forthrightness, balance, and sheer determination to adhere to Scripture. In our view, it is a great and practical contribution to our understanding of what it means to be "a holy people unto the Lord," and as such, the Christian church would be impoverished without it, and will gain when its message is heard and received.

## Part 6 The Application of the Work of Redemption

### Chapter 26

#### PERSEVERANCE

“They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.”<sup>(1)</sup>

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

In this study of the theology of Bishop Ryle, we have been deeply impressed by the balance, clear and balanced teaching, and warm pastoral concern expressed in the bishop’s writings. It is, therefore, painful to find that the bishop’s sure touch seems to have deserted him in the one extensive paper he produced on the subject of the perseverance of the saints.<sup>(2)</sup> The doctrine is orthodox, but the presentation, and the argument, leave much to be desired. We will comment in detail as we pursue the subject. Here it must suffice to say that we feel considerable disappointment, particularly as so much of Ryle’s other writing is of such a high standard. We begin, as usual, with the bishop’s definition of the doctrine.

#### 2 THE NATURE OF PERSEVERANCE

“When I speak of the doctrine of perseverance, I mean this. I say that the Bible teaches that true believers, real genuine Christians, shall persevere in their religion to the end of their lives. They shall never perish. They shall never be lost. They shall never be cast away. Once in Christ, they shall always be in Christ. Once made

children of God by adoption and grace, they shall never cease to be His children and become children of the devil. Once endued with the grace of the Spirit, that grace shall never be taken from them. Once pardoned and forgiven, they shall never be deprived of their pardon. Once joined to Christ by living faith, their union shall never be broken off. Once called by God into the narrow way that leads to life, they shall never be allowed to fall into hell. In a word, every man, woman, and child on earth that receives saving grace, shall sooner or later receive eternal glory. Every soul that is once justified and washed in Christ's blood, shall at length be found safe at Christ's right hand in the day of judgment.''(3)

So far, so good. Here is the evangelical doctrine spelled out in the plainest terms. There is an astute use of expressions and antitheses that show the incongruity of the possibility of finally falling from grace. There is a proper emphasis of the decisive role of Divine sovereignty, and a similar stress on the power of grace.

### **3 MISREPRESENTATION OF PERSEVERANCE**

Having made his definition, Ryle now seeks to preserve the doctrine from misrepresentation. He goes to some length to stress that the doctrine does not refer to the unconverted, or to the false professor of religion, but only to "real, true spiritual Christians...the sheep of Christ who hear His voice and follow Him.''(4)

It is here that the problem with Ryle's treatment of the subject begins. The fact of the matter is, that no serious critic of the doctrine of perseverance has

attacked it on the grounds that its teaching secures eternal salvation for the non-elect! Why then does the bishop make so much of this point? He is surely fighting a “straw man”!

#### **4 CLARIFICATION OF PERSEVERANCE**

The doctrine having been secured from misrepresentation, there follows a wise and very helpful clearing up of any possible misunderstanding about the teaching.

##### **4.1 Perseverance and the Sins of Believers**

“Remember, then, that when I say believers shall persevere to the end, I do *not for a moment say that they shall never fall into sin*. They may fall sadly, foully, and shamefully, to the scandal of true religion, to the injury of their families, to their own deep and bitter sorrow. [There follow many Biblical examples.]...But believers shall never fall *totally, finally, and completely*. They shall always rise again from their falls by repentance, and renew their walk with God. Though sorely humbled and cast down, they never entirely lose their grace....They may be overtaken by a fault, and carried away by temptation. But they never perish.”<sup>(5)</sup>

##### **4.2 Perseverance and the Lack of Assurance**

“Remember, for another thing, that when I say believers shall persevere to the end, *I do not mean that they shall have no doubts and fears about their own safety*. So far from this being the case, the holiest men of God are sometimes sorely troubled by anxieties about

their own spiritual condition. They see so much weakness in their own hearts, and find their practice come so short of their desires, that they are strongly tempted to doubt the truth of their own grace, and to fancy they are but hypocrites, and shall never reach heaven at all. ...There are many true believers who never enjoy the full assurance of hope all their days. Their faith is so weak, and their sense of sin so strong, that they never feel confident of their own interest in Christ...The “joy and peace in believing,” which some feel, and the “witness of the Spirit,” which some experience, are things which some believers, whose faith it is impossible to deny, never appear to attain. Called as they evidently are by the grace of God, they never seem to taste the full comfort of their calling. But still they are perfectly safe, though they themselves refuse to know it...The full assurance of hope is not necessary to salvation. The absence of it is no argument against a man’s perseverance to the end.”<sup>(6)</sup>

#### **4.3 Perseverance and Diligence in the Means of Grace**

“Remember, in the last place, that the certain perseverance of believers *does not free them from the necessity of watching, praying, and using means, or make it needless to ply them with practical exhortations.* So far from this being the case, it is just by the use of means that God enables them to continue in the faith. He draws them with “the cords of a man.” [A reference to Hosea 11:4, which tells of the Lord’s paternal care for His people.] He uses

warnings and conditional promises as part of the machinery by which He insures their final safety. The very fact that they despised the helps and ordinances which God has appointed, would be a plain proof that they had no grace at all and were on the road to destruction....The cautions, and conditional promises, and admonitions to believers, with which Scripture abounds, are all part of the Divine agency by which their perseverance is effected....They that persevere to the end are not dependent on any means, but still they are not independent of them. Their final salvation does not hang on their obedience to practical exhortations, but it is just in taking heed to such exhortations that they will always continue to the end. It is the diligent, the watchful, the prayerful, and the humble, to whom belongs the promise, - "They shall never perish." "(7)

Ryle's work of clarification is marked by his usual commonsense, and he makes some telling points, particularly in his careful analysis of the function of the warnings to Christians, and their use of the appointed means of grace.

## **5 DEFENCE OF PERSEVERANCE**

After a brief defence of the doctrine against unfounded criticisms related to its alleged "Calvinism" - a theological swearword in some circles in Anglicanism in the nineteenth century - and of equally ignorant assertions that it was not taught in the official formularies of the church, Ryle turns to what he terms "the Scriptural foundations on which the doctrine is built." (8)

## 5.1 Perseverance and the Testimony of Scripture

In our view it is at this point that the good bishop is most open to justifiable criticism. Most of his defence consists of an apparently imposing list of thirty-nine texts of Scripture<sup>(9)</sup>, deliberately given without explanatory or exegetical comment. In fact, he indicates that comment would be superfluous. He says:

“I will make no comment on them. I had rather leave them to the honest common sense of all who read the Bible...not a few of the thirty-nine which appear to my mind so plain, that were I to invent words to confirm my views, I should despair of inventing any that would convey my meaning so unmistakably.”<sup>(10)</sup>

Now, of course, there are some very plain texts among them, but the fact is that many well-instructed Wesleyan Arminians did have alternative explanations for them. In the present writer's view such explanations do not really satisfy, but Ryle feels disposed to *ignore* them, which simply will not do! In similarly cavalier fashion he dismisses a number of apparently contrary texts with comments that in some cases at least, do not do justice to them. In any case, he relegates such texts, and his response to them, to a footnote in small print, and in a further footnote admits that his opponents have further texts, which he does not quote!<sup>(11)</sup> It is regretted that space does not allow a detailed examination of Ryle's treatment of the texts, but the point we are making is that he does not quote and refute his opponents' arguments on his own proof-texts, and offers only very brief rebuttals of the texts they rely on. In addition, and perhaps more seriously, the whole idea of arraying texts of



scripture in ranks, and “winning” a theological argument on the basis of numbers, is inappropriate. Texts must be seen in context, and then, if really suitable, woven into principal theological argument.

One takes no pleasure in making these criticisms, and they are not meant to reflect on Ryle’s integrity, or to suggest a lack of understanding of the Arminian position on his part. (As a matter of fact we know that he was aware of Arminian arguments, for he quotes the Arminian Puritan, John Goodwin, on John 10:28!)(12) However, Ryle does endeavour in some measure to move the debate to more broadly theological grounds in discussing the doctrine against the background of the attributes of God, and the work and offices of Christ.

## **5.2 Perseverance and the Attributes of God**

“I might point out to the *attributes of God’s character revealed in the Bible*, and show how His wisdom, unchangeableness, and power, and love, and glory are all involved in the perseverance of the saints. If the elect may finally perish, what becomes of God’s counsel about them in eternity, and His doings for them in time?”(13)

## **5.2 Perseverance and the Offices of Christ**

“I might point to all *the offices which the Lord Jesus fills*, and show what discredit is thrown on His discharge of them, if any of His believing people can finally be lost. What kind of Head would He be, if any of the members of His mystical body could be torn from Him? What kind of Shepherd would He be, if a single sheep of

His flock was left behind in the wilderness? What kind of a Physician would He be, if any patient under His hand were at length found incurable? What kind of High Priest would He be, if any name once written on His heart were found wanting when He makes up His jewels? What kind of Husband would He be, if He and any soul once united to Him by faith were ever put asunder?“(14)

Here the bishop is more his usual commanding self. His references to the doctrines relating to the attributes and offices are well chosen, and the analogies from Christ’s mediatorial responsibilities are telling. One could have wished that He had developed these with his accustomed wealth of Scripture, including many of those in his original list. They would have made a more profound, if less obvious, impression.

## 6 CONCLUSION

While the bishop's paper goes on to deal, quite adequately, with practical implications of the doctrine, these add nothing essential to our theological understanding of the teaching.

We have expressed our disappointment with what we believe are shortcomings in the exposition. These shortcomings are present elsewhere in his writings, but not so obviously, and they betray a tendency, characteristic of his day, and of his school, to view Scripture as a mine from which propositional texts are to be dug, sometimes with scant regard for their overall significance. But even here we must not be too critical, for often the texts chosen are apposite and instructive.

Having expressed these reservations, we may still say that the exposition is not without insight, and is helpful in the way that it removes misunderstanding about the doctrine.

## Part 7 The Church and the Sacraments

### Chapter 27

# THE NATURE AND ATTRIBUTES OF THE CHURCH

“The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.” (1)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The subject of the church was one that occupied a great deal of the time of Victorian churchmen. The Tractarians, especially in their emphasis on Apostolic Succession, held very distinctive, and widely disseminated, views on the subject, and Ryle’s writings on the doctrine of the church must be seen against that background. However, while the bishop was very active in seeking to refute Anglo-Catholic views, and was concerned about issues such as the Church of England’s “distinctive principles” and the “comprehensiveness” of the Established Church<sup>(2)</sup>, his theological exposition of the doctrine of the Church as such is much more restrictive, and is limited, to all intents and purposes to a paper entitled “The Church” which appears in his book, “*Knots Untied*”<sup>(3)</sup> This volume was avowedly produced to present the “Evangelical” perspective on “subjects which are matters of dispute among English Churchmen.”<sup>(4)</sup> As such, the treatment is not one that covers every aspect of the doctrine. It must also be remembered that Bishop Ryle was determined, as an evangelical, to “steadily refuse to exalt the Church above Christ.”<sup>(5)</sup> As he puts it: “We protest against the modern practice of first

personifying the Church, then deifying it, and finally idolizing it.”<sup>(6)</sup>

It is perhaps as well to mention that while Ryle’s papers on the internal ecclesiastical struggles within the Church of England are invaluable, they do not really form part of his formal theological position, and therefore are not included in this thesis, except incidentally.

## **2 NEW TESTAMENT USAGE OF “EKKLESIA”**

In a footnote to his paper, Ryle gives us the following comments bearing on the subject:

“There seem to be four meanings of the word Church in the New Testament. (1) It is applied to the whole body of the elect. (Heb.xii.23.) (2) It is applied to the baptized Christians of a particular place or district. (Acts viii.1.) (3) It is applied to a small number of professing Christians, in a particular family. (Rom.xvi.5.) (4) It is applied to the whole body of baptized people throughout the world, both good and bad. (I Cor. xii.28.) In the fourth sense the word is used very seldom indeed. The first and second senses are the most common.”<sup>(7)</sup>

These comments bear comparison with Berkhof’s more extended treatment in his “Systematic Theology”<sup>(8)</sup>, in that although the latter develops the concepts more fully, they are in most particulars in agreement with Ryle.

## **3 DESCRIPTION OF THE CHURCH**

We use the word “description” advisedly, as Ryle does not actually seek to define the church, but rather describes it in terms of its membership and

spiritual union. We quote him at length:

“The one true Church is well described in the Communion Service of the Church of England, as “the mystical body of Christ, which is the blessed company of all faithful people.” It is composed of all believers in the Lord Jesus. - It is made up of all God’s elect, - of all converted men and women, - of all true Christians. In whatsoever we can discern the election of God the Father, the sprinkling of the blood of God the Son, the sanctifying work of God the Spirit, in that person we see a member of Christ’s true Church. It is a Church of which all the members have the same marks. They are all born again of the Spirit. - They all possess “repentance towards God, faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ,” and holiness of life and conversation. - They all hate sin, and they all love Christ. - They worship differently, and after various fashions...But they all worship with one heart. - They are all led by one Spirit. - They all build upon one foundation. They all draw their religion from one single book. - They are all joined to one great Centre, that is Jesus Christ... It is a Church which is dependent upon no ministers upon earth, however much it values those who preach the Gospel to its members. The life of its members does not hang on Church-membership and baptism and the Lord’s Supper, although they highly value these things where they are to be had. But it has only one Great Head, -one Shepherd, - one chief Bishop, - and that is Jesus Christ. He alone, by His Spirit, admits the members of this

Church, though ministers may show the door. Once let a man repent and believe the Gospel, and that moment he becomes a member of this Church... It is a Church whose existence does not depend on forms, ceremonies, cathedrals, churches, chapels, pulpits, fonts, vestments, organs, endowments, money, kings, governments, magistrates, or any favour whatsoever from the hand of man. It has often lived on and continued when all these things have been taken from it...its existence depends on nothing but the presence of Christ and His Spirit, and so long as they are with it the Church cannot die.’’(9)

Two important observations must be made at this point. The first is that Ryle is describing the church in the Ephesian sense (Ephesians 1:22-23) as the mystical body of Christ, and not merely a visible church. The second is that the exposition is highly polemical. It is strongly opposed to the view that sees the Church where its externals are present, whether “‘validly ordained”’ clergy, or the sacraments, or buildings, or secular recognition.

This true church then, is recognizable by its redeemed, regenerate membership in their mystical union with their Head, Jesus Christ, and their essential unity (despite outward differences) in sharing the new birth, sanctification, and heart-worship. The life of this church is dependent on the Life of its Head, Jesus Christ, mediated by the life-giving Spirit.

#### 4 THE NAMES OF THE CHURCH

“This is the Church to which the titles of present honour and privilege, and the promises of future glory especially belong. This is the body of Christ.- This is the bride. - This is the Lamb’s wife. - This is the flock of Christ. - This is the household of faith and family of God. - This is God’s building, God’s foundation, and the temple of the Holy Ghost. This is the Church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven. This is the royal priesthood, the chosen generation, the peculiar people, the purchased possession, the habitation of God, the light of the world, the salt and the wheat of the earth.”<sup>(10)</sup>

To the present writer, this description is breathtaking. The concepts, all drawn from Holy Scripture, so rhythmically arranged, so instructive in their placing - e.g. “God’s building, God’s foundation, and the temple of the Holy Ghost” -, and so extensive in imagery, conjure up pictures of the church that move one to worship and thanksgiving. The tawdriness of “church politics”; the grind of ecclesiastical machinery are for a while forgotten, and one recaptures the Pauline vision of “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing:...but holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:27.)



## 5 THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE CHURCH

Ryle follows the traditional treatment of the attributes - unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity - but in the plainest and most practical language.

“This is the “holy Catholic Church” of the Apostle’s [sic] Creed. - This is the “One Catholic and Apostolic Church of the Nicene Creed. - This is the Church to which the Lord Jesus promises “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” and to which He says, “I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” (Matt.xvi. 18, xxviii.20.)<sup>(11)</sup>

### 5.1 The Attribute of Unity.

“This is the only Church that possesses true *unity*. Its members are entirely agreed on all the weightier matters of religion, for they are all taught by one Spirit. About God, and Christ, and the Spirit, and sin, and their own hearts, and faith, and repentance, and the necessity of holiness, and the value of the Bible, and the importance of prayer, and the resurrection, and judgment to come, - about all these points they see eye to eye. Take three or four of them, strangers to one another, from the remotest corners of the earth.

Examine them separately on these points. You will find them all of one mind.”<sup>(12)</sup>

### 5.2 The Attribute of Sanctity

“This is the only Church which possesses true *sanctity*. Its members are all holy. They are not merely holy by profession, holy in name,

and holy in the judgment of charity. They are all holy in act, and deed, and reality, and life, and truth. They are all more or less conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. They are all more or less like their great Head. No unholy man belongs to this Church.”<sup>(13)</sup>

### **5.3 The Attribute of Catholicity.**

“This is the only Church which is truly *Catholic*. It is not the Church of any one nation or people. Its members are to be found in every part of the world where the Gospel is received and believed. It is not confined within the limits of any one country, nor pent up within the pale of any particular forms or outward government. In it there is no difference between Jew and Greek, black man and white, Episcopalian and Presbyterian; -but faith in Christ is all. Its members will be gathered from north, and south, and east, and west, in the last day, and will be of every name, and denomination, and kindred, and people, and tongue, but all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>(14)</sup>

### **5.4 The Attribute of Apostolicity.**

“This is the only Church which is truly *Apostolic*. It is built on the foundation laid by the Apostles, and holds the doctrines which they preached. The two grand objects at which its members aim, are apostolic faith and apostolic practice; and they consider the man who talks of following the Apostles without possessing these two things, to be no better than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.”<sup>(15)</sup>

Ryle's analysis of the attributes of the church is broadly orthodox protestantism, albeit the evangelical protestantism of a century ago. Its strengths are its plain-ness and clarity. It sees the unity in heavily doctrinal terms, making less of the unity of spiritual life than one might expect. This may be because he has emphasised this aspect earlier. The doctrinal unity is expressed in strictly evangelical protestant terms, and goes beyond what the present writer would mark as reasonable parameters of doctrinal agreement. For example, a person may be a true Christian, and differ from another on the nature of faith itself. We would rather see the doctrinal unity more in the area of the ecumenical creeds - after all we are not justified by understanding justification by faith, but by believing in Christ! However, Ryle's statement must be seen in its historical context of contending for the faith against Romanisers and Rationalists within the Established Church, which may explain his apparently narrow viewpoint.

## **6 THE CHURCH MILITANT AND THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT**

The bishop's presentation of this aspect of the church is strictly pastoral, but this note lends charm to it, and removes it from the area of dogmatic speculation to one of practical usefulness and encouragement.

### **6.1 The Church Militant**

“This is the Church which *does the work of Christ* upon earth. Its numbers are a little flock, and few in number compared with the children of the world: - one or two here, and two or three there, - a few in this parish, and a few in that. But these are they who shake

the universe. - These are they who change the fortunes of kingdoms by their prayers. - These are they who are the active workers for spreading the knowledge of pure religion and undefiled. - These are the life-blood of a country, - the shield, the defence, the stay and the support of any nation to which they belong.”<sup>(16)</sup>

## 6.2 The Church Triumphant

“This is the Church which *shall be truly glorious* at the end of all things. When all earthly glory is passed away, then shall this Church be presented without spot, before God the Father’s throne. Thrones, principalities, and powers upon earth shall come to nothing. - Dignities and offices and endowments shall all pass away. - But the Church of the first-born shall shine as the stars at the last, and be presented with joy before the Father’s throne, in the day of Christ’s appearing. When the Lord’s jewels are made up, and the manifestation of the sons of God takes place, Episcopacy, and Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism will not be mentioned. One Church only will be named, and that is the Church of the elect.”<sup>(17)</sup>

Now, we may find the above somewhat anaemic in doctrinal content. The fact of the matter is, that Ryle takes these two concepts and shows that they mean something for the way that members of that Church of which he speaks can view their humble circumstances as the seemingly perpetual minority, and still exude the confidence that should mark the sons and daughters of God. They are, despite appearances, the truly significant people, and they have a glorious destiny.

## 7 MARKS OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH

Although Ryle spent a great deal of his exposition of the doctrine of the church teaching about the “True Church” he was not unaware of the need to instruct the Lord’s people about the local church, using the New Testament churches as models. The lessons he finds there are interesting, even illuminating. After a word of introduction as to the fact of the mention of several particular churches in the New Testament, he gives instruction about their membership, the conditional character of their existence, and the activities that marked them. He records that they were “mixed bodies.” “They consisted not only of converted persons, but of many unconverted persons also....[and] members who fell into gross errors and mistakes, both of faith and practice. This is clear from the account we have of the Churches at Corinth, at Ephesus, and at Sardis.”<sup>(18)</sup>

Further, “in all these Churches there was public worship, preaching, reading of the Scriptures, prayer, praise, discipline, order, government, the ministry, and the sacraments.”<sup>(19)</sup> He contrasts the great amount of information we have about their doctrine and practice with the very little that we have about the details of their government and outward ceremonies.<sup>(20)</sup> As he expresses it: “Their two chief principles seem to be, “Let all things be done decently and in order; - Let all things be done unto edification.” (I Cor.xiv. 26,40.) But as to the application of these general principles, it seems to have been left to each particular Church to decide.”<sup>(21)</sup>

Admittedly, he offers a rather sketchy presentation, but Ryle’s point seems to have been that the essentials of the true Church are what should occupy the

Lord's people most in Ecclesiology, and that they should be concerned about the local congregation from a point of view of soundness in doctrine and practice, rather than being exercised to defend particular forms of church government and ceremonies. This has obvious reference to the Tractarians, for whom episcopacy and outward form seemed to be all-important.

## **8 CONCLUSION**

Bishop Ryle's exposition of the doctrine of the Church is obviously evangelical, and obviously majors on the vital truths as to the essential nature of the church, rather than on detail about particular practices. There is little attempt to address ecumenical problems - this is probably a sign of his times! But it has value in reminding us in our ecumenical age of the real unity that does exist, in essential terms, and which we often ignore in our attempts to secure external union of churches.

Both are important.

Ryle's view of the ministry we reserve to our next chapter.

## Part 7 The Church and the Sacraments

### Chapter 28

#### THE MINISTRY

“And now again we exhort you, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you have in remembrance, into how high a dignity, and to how weighty an office and charge ye are called: that is to say, to be messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord; to teach and premonish, to feed and provide for the Lord’s family; to seek for Christ’s sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever.”<sup>(1)</sup>

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

The subject of the ministry was not one that occupied Bishop Ryle as a subject for exposition, although he valued it highly, except insofar as it was seen by him to be a subject on which one’s views might lead one away from the gospel. What he means by this is brought out in part of his paper on “Evangelical Religion” in *“Knots Untied”*.

“I...say that Evangelical Religion *does not under value the Christian ministry*. It is not true to say that we do. We regard it as an honourable office instituted by Christ Himself, and of general necessity for carrying on the work of the Gospel. We look on ministers as preachers of God’s Word, God’s ambassadors, God’s messengers, God’s servants, God’s shepherds, God’s stewards, God’s overseers, and labourers in God’s vineyard. But we steadily

refuse to admit that Christian ministers are in any sense sacrificing priests, mediators between God and man, lords of men's consciences, or private confessors. We refuse it, not only because we cannot see it in the Bible, but also because we have read the lessons of Church history. We find that Sacerdotalism, or priestcraft, has frequently been the curse of Christianity, and the ruin of true religion. And we say boldly that the exaltation of the ministerial office to an unscriptural place and extravagant dignity in the Church of England in the present day, is likely to alienate the affections of the laity, to ruin the Church, and to be the source of every kind of error and superstition."<sup>(2)</sup>

This lengthy quotation sums up the main features in Ryle's view of the ministry, and we will follow the principal points he makes there.

## **2 THE BIBLICAL WARRANT FOR THE MINISTRY**

Among evangelical Christians in England during the nineteenth century, there was a tendency to undervalue the ordained ministry.<sup>(3)</sup> The so-called "Plymouth Brethren" of course felt free to dispense with the ordained ministry altogether. In contrast, Ryle holds firmly to the view that the ordained ministry is clearly justified from the New Testament. He says:

"The office of a minister is a Scriptural institution, ordained, appointed, taught, and commanded, both directly and indirectly, in the New Testament. From the very first an order of men was set apart for the service of religion, for the conduct of public worship, for keeping up prayer and praise, for administering the sacraments,



for teaching the ignorant, for building up the saints, and for ordaining others to carry on God's work in the world. In short, wherever the Apostles founded Churches, they appointed pastors to feed the flocks they had gathered together. The proof of this assertion stands out so plainly before my eyes in the Acts and Epistles, that I am unable to understand how any one who takes the Bible for his rule of faith can get over it. The two Epistles of St. Paul to Timothy, and the one to Titus, appear to me to settle the question...Beside them stand the broad facts that St. Paul "ordained elders in every Church"(Acts xiv.23,) - that "elders" of the Church are mentioned six times in the Acts and in the Epistles of James and Peter, - that the Epistle to the Ephesians gives a list of officers set in the Church of God, and the Epistle to the Philippians begins by naming with the saints at Philippi "the bishops and deacons." All these facts, I say, make a mass of evidence which I cannot get over...in the face of these facts I am justified in asserting with confidence that the ministerial office is a Scriptural institution."<sup>(4)</sup>

There is, of course, nothing exceptional in the bishop's comments; we would take his position for granted. However, it must be remembered that it was a common-place among Tractarians to accuse evangelicals as holding "low" views of the ministry, and Ryle is concerned to refute that allegation. This is also what is in view when we consider his next point, the importance of the ministry.

### **3 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MINISTRY**

Ryle gives two reasons for valuing the ministry highly, but a study of his reasons discloses a third, so we will deal with three features that compel Ryle to regard the ministry as important.

#### **3.1 Divine Provision for the Ministry of the Means of Grace**

“...the ministerial office is *a most wise and useful provision of God.*

It secures the regular maintenance of all Christ’s ordinances and means of grace. It provides an undying machinery for promoting the awakening of sinners and the edification of saints...Our God is a God of order, and a God who works by means, and we have no right to expect His cause to be kept up by constant miraculous interpositions, while His servants stand idle. For the uninterrupted preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments, no better plan can be devised than the appointment of a regular order of men who shall give themselves wholly to Christ’s business.”<sup>(5)</sup>

#### **3.2 The Ambassadorial Privilege of the Ministry**

“For another thing, let us settle it firmly in our minds that the ministerial office is an *honourable privilege.* It is an honour to be the Ambassador of a King: the very PERSON of such an officer of State is respected, and called legally sacred. It is an honour to bear the tidings of a victory such as Trafalgar and Waterloo... But how much greater honour is it to be the ambassador of the King of kings, and to proclaim the good news of the conquest achieved on Calvary. To serve directly such a Master, to carry such a message, to know

that the results of our work, if God shall bless it, are eternal, this is indeed a privilege...whether men will hear or forbear, the office of a faithful ambassador is honourable.”<sup>(6)</sup>

### **3.3 The Deep and Painful Responsibility of the Ministry**

“Let it be remembered that while our office is honourable, useful, and Scriptural, it is also one of deep and painful responsibility! We watch for souls “as those who must give account” at the judgment day (Heb.xiii. 17). If souls are lost through our unfaithfulness, their blood will be required at our hands. If we had only to read services and administer sacraments, to wear..peculiar dress and go through a round of ceremonies, bodily exercise, gestures, and postures, our position would be comparatively light. But this is not all. We have got to deliver our Master’s message, - to keep back nothing that is profitable, - to declare the whole counsel of God. If we tell our congregations less than the truth or more than the truth we may ruin for ever immortal souls.

Life and death are in the power of the preacher’s tongue. “Woe is unto us if we preach not the gospel!” (I Cor. ix. 16).<sup>(7)</sup>

Usefulness, unparalleled privilege, solemn responsibility - these are what give the ministry its dignity and importance. And all three qualities are linked, in Ryle’s mind, with the ministry of the Word - it is this above all that makes the ministry significant. To this we will return shortly, but meanwhile we must consider the polemical element in the bishop’s view of the ministry.

## 4 FALSE VIEWS OF THE MINISTRY

During the nineteenth century, with the rise of Tractarianism and later, Ritualism, there arose views about the ministry that were abhorrent to true protestants. These views included the notion that the minister was a sacrificing priest, and the introduction of auricular confession. These are both matters of common notoriety, but interested readers can follow the story more fully in S.C.Carpenter's '*Church and People*', and Chadwick's magisterial '*The Victorian Church*.'<sup>(8)</sup> These ideas were also, of course held in full, by the Roman Catholic Church.

Such ideas were anathema to a man like Bishop Ryle. So, in his "Thoughts on the Ministry" in '*Principles for Churchmen*' he fulminates against them in no uncertain terms. His method is "to point out what a minister of the New Testament is not, and was never meant to be."<sup>(9)</sup> Nor does Ryle believe that the subject is a matter of relative unimportance; on the contrary, his words could scarcely be stronger! As he puts it:

"I can find no words to express my strong feeling about the importance of holding right views of the ministerial office. Error on this point has been the plague of the Church of Christ for at least sixteen centuries, and the fruitful source of innumerable evils."<sup>(10)</sup>

What then are these negative facts about the ministry?

### 4.1 The Minister not a Mediator between God and Man

"First and foremost, the Christian minister is *not a mediator* between God and men. This is an office which belongs to Christ alone, and He has never deputed it to any one. Christianity is not a

vicarious religion. I mean by this that a man cannot put his soul in his minister's hands as he puts his money in the hands of a banker, or his legal affairs in the hands of a lawyer, and then assume that of course he will go to heaven. This is a complete delusion. Every one of us must have personal dealings of himself with Christ, by his own faith, his own prayer, and his own actions, and no one else can act for him. We must seek for ourselves, if we want the door of mercy to be opened. A true minister will show the Mediator; but he cannot be the mediator himself.<sup>(11)</sup>

The language used here is so strong that one is bound to ask whether any serious professing Christian could have such naive views as those castigated by Ryle. The fact is, however, as the present writer can testify from personal pastoral experience, that even today, there are Roman Catholics who do view the priest as a mediator, and who do believe that they can put their spiritual welfare in the hands of the church.

#### **4.2 The Minister not a Dispenser of Grace**

“In the next place, the Christian minister *cannot give grace*. He cannot give it at the font, when he reads the baptismal service and receives an infant into the Church. He cannot give it at the communion table, when he consecrates the bread and wine, and gives them to the communicants. He cannot give it in the pulpit, however faithfully he preaches the gospel. He cannot give it at the bedside of a dying man, however faithfully and lovingly he pleads with him. Oh no! To give life is the peculiar prerogative of

God...We may teach the value and need of grace, but we cannot give it...What we say, the Holy Ghost must apply to the soul.”<sup>(12)</sup>

### 4.3 The Minister not a Confessor

“In the next place, the Christian minister was not meant to be a *confessor*. It is supposed by some Christians that one chief duty of a minister of religion is to hear private confessions of sin from the people committed to his charge, and after hearing to grant absolution. The idea is utterly without warrant of Scripture. There is neither precept or example to justify it. The practice is dishonouring to the priestly office of Christ, and has been proved by experience to do far more harm than good. It puts two sinners in a thoroughly wrong position... It sinks one poor sinner into the degrading attitude of a serf. It raises another poor sinner into a dangerous mastery over his brother’s soul. It makes the confessor little less than a God...I charge [my readers] never to countenance the idea that clergymen ought to be confessors, or to tolerate any attempt to reintroduce auricular confession.”<sup>(13)</sup>

This brief condemnation of the concept of the minister as a confessor is dealt with at greater length in a paper on “Confession” in *“Knots Untied”*,<sup>(14)</sup> in which Ryle looks at the biblical, historical and ecclesiastical aspects of the subject. However, the above summary is an adequate precis of his position.

#### **4.4 The Minister not Infallible**

“In the next place, the Christian minister is *not infallible*. The vulgar notion that a clergyman is not likely to hold or teach erroneous doctrines, and that we seldom need to doubt the truth of anything he tells us in the pulpit, is one of the most mischievous errors which has been bequeathed to England by the Church of Rome. It is a complete delusion. Ordination confers no immunity from error. Clergymen, like Churches, may err both in living and matters of faith...The teaching of all ministers ought to be constantly compared with the Scriptures, and when it contradicts the Scriptures it ought not to be believed.....”<sup>(15)</sup>

Again, this is a subject that the bishop felt to be of such importance that he devoted a lengthy paper entitled “The Fallibility of Ministers” to the subject.<sup>(16)</sup>

#### **4.5 The Minister not a Sacrificing Priest**

“Last, but not least, the Christian minister is *not a sacrificing priest*, and does not offer any sacrifice in the Lord’s Supper. This is a point which it is of the utmost importance to understand. A flood of erroneous teaching is coming over the Church of England on the subject, and it becomes every loyal Churchman to be on his guard. That a clergyman is repeatedly called a “priest” in the rubrics of the Prayer-book no one thinks of denying. But that the word “priest” in these rubrics means anything more than “presbyter” or “elder” can never be proved. It certainly does not mean a person

who offers up a sacrifice. The plain truth is, that *there can be no priest without a sacrifice*; and for any sacrifice in the Lord's Supper, except that of praise and thanksgiving, which all Christians can offer up, there is no place under the Gospel, or in the standards of the Church of England."<sup>(17)</sup>

These then, are the five basic errors about the ministry that Ryle sees as a danger to the gospel. Insofar as they are still held by Rome, and by Anglo-Catholics, they are still a danger.

## **5 THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY**

In common with all Reformed Christians, Bishop Ryle believed that the supreme work of the ministry is the preaching of the Word of God. Because of this he tended to under-emphasise the pastoral responsibilities of the minister, and references to this aspect of ministerial labour are sparsely scattered in his written works. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that when he was elevated to the episcopate there was something of a change. While still emphasising preaching as a primary responsibility, he found it necessary, as we shall see, to counsel his clergy not to neglect their personal, pastoral responsibilities.

### **5.1 The Work of a Minister as a Preacher**

The evangelical leader, whose teachings we are studying, saw himself, first and foremost, as a preacher of the gospel. Marcus Loane tells us that "when a new pulpit was placed in the church at Stradbroke, he [Ryle] had a text carved round its top so that his eye could not fail to catch sight of its emphatic



injunction..."Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel." "(18) He was tireless in evangelism, and in the exposition of the Word of God, and he believed that this ministry of the Word was the vital work of a clergyman. Commenting on Matthew 4:17, he writes:

"There is no office so honorable as that of the preacher. There is no work so important to the souls of men. It is an office which the Son of God was not ashamed to take up. It is an office to which He appointed His twelve apostles. It is an office to which St. Paul in his old age specially directs Timothy's attention. He charges him with almost his last breath to "preach the word." It is the means which God has always been pleased to use above any other, for the conversion and edification of souls."(19)

Again, he admonishes the diocese of Liverpool, in 1884:

"The preaching of the pure Word of God is declared by our Articles to be the first mark of a healthy Church. It is sound doctrine taught and preached, and not ritual, which in every age the Holy Ghost has used for awakening sleeping human consciences, building up the cause of Christ, and saving souls."(20)

It is the same in his historical studies. Of the eighteenth century revival he writes:

"The instrumentality by which the spiritual reformers of the last century carried on their operations was of the simplest description. It was neither more nor less than the old apostolic weapon of

preaching. The sword which St.Paul wielded with such mighty effect, when he assaulted the strongholds of heathenism eighteen hundred years ago, was the same sword by which they won their victories....beyond doubt preaching was their favourite weapon. They wisely went back to first principles, and took up apostolic plans. They held, with St.Paul, that a minister's first work is "to preach the gospel." "(21)

Instances of this emphasis could be multiplied, but we submit that we have cited enough examples to prove our point. But there are other duties, and to Ryle's view of these we now turn.

## **5.2 Other Duties of a Minister**

So seriously did Ryle's clergy take his exhortations about giving themselves to the ministry of the Word in preaching, he found it necessary to remind them that they had other responsibilities, notably the visitation of the flock. And so he admonishes them:

"To secure the sympathy and personal affection of parishioners is one great secret of ministerial usefulness....I must earnestly and affectionately entreat my clergy to lay this matter to heart, to review carefully their own systems of employing their time, and to take heed that they make time every week for a due proportion of systematic house-to-house visitation.'"(22)

The other labours in which a faithful minister is to be employed are described briefly but comprehensively in his '*Thoughts on the Ministry*', although it is

important to note that they are seen as subordinate to the preaching ministry.

Ryle summarises these labours thus:

“That the Christian minister is intended to lead the worship of God in the congregation, to read the Scriptures to the people, to administer the Sacrament, to visit the sick and dying, to carry the gospel from house to house, to look carefully after the young, to maintain godly discipline, to instruct the ignorant, to warn the unruly, to comfort the feeble-minded, to reprove, to rebuke, to exhort, to sympathise as occasion requires, - all this is undoubtedly true. The clergyman who neglects such work is not doing his duty.”<sup>(23)</sup>

Here are liturgical, catechising, pastoral and general care for the flock. All are part of the ministerial calling, and the neglect of them is culpable. But still, Ryle adds, “the main, principal, and foremost business of a minister in the Church of England is to be a preacher of the word.”<sup>(24)</sup>

## 6 EPISCOPACY

It remains for us to add a brief word about Ryle’s views on Church Polity. As we have seen in our earlier study of his doctrine of the Church, he regarded Church Polity as peripheral.<sup>(25)</sup> He was, of course, an episcopalian, and he makes it clear that he is such by conviction. In a paper, “*Church and Dissent*,” he states:

“I prefer the Church’s *form of government* to that of the Chapel.

Episcopacy, no doubt, is very badly exhibited at present in our huge

overgrown dioceses, and needs a complete reform. But Episcopacy, in my judgment, is infinitely better than Presbyterianism, or Congregationalism, or the anarchy of Plymouth Brethrenism. I might add that I see far more for it in Scripture.”<sup>(26)</sup>

But Bishop Ryle was not a man looking for petty “shibboleths”, and he would not deny the presence of grace, and an abundance of it, among dissenters.<sup>(27)</sup> Nor would he allow the question a prominent place in his theology. Writing in one of his historical works, he says, in the context of the non-episcopal ordination of the puritan William Gurnall:

“The matter, after all, is not one of primary importance. The Divine right of Episcopacy, to the exclusion of all other forms of Church Government, and the absolute necessity of Episcopal Ordination to make a right minister of Christ, are positions that cannot be established from Scripture. The 23rd Article of the Church of England has exhibited a wise moderation in handling the whole question. It says: “It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the Sacrament in the congregation, before he be lawfully called and sent to execute the same.” But the Article cautiously avoids defining too closely what are valid orders. It goes on: “Those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to the work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation to call and to send ministers into the Lord’s vineyard.” This, we need not doubt, was Gurnall’s position.”<sup>(28)</sup>

This is indeed moderate episcopacy, far removed from the uncompromising Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888. And of course it is the classical evangelical position, within the Anglican church.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

This survey of Ryle's teaching on the Ministry reveals the ardent evangelical, full of zeal for the gospel, and anxious to see ministers exercising a full-orbed, public and private, ministry of the Word. He is equally concerned that Ritualistic views of the ministry should be resisted as subversive of the true gospel. Summing up, we may affirm that his teaching here is consistent with everything else that Ryle teaches - his praxis is dependent on his basic theology.

## Part 7 The Church and the Sacraments

### Chapter 29

#### THE SACRAMENTS IN GENERAL

“Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men’s profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God’s good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him....in such only as worthily receive the same they have a wholesome effect or operation..”(1)

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

The subject of the sacraments was one of the most bitterly contested issues in the Church of England in the nineteenth century. This controversy is reflected in Bishop Ryle’s writings. Half-a-dozen of the articles in *“Knots Untied”* relate to this subject in one way or another, and in addition the matter has a prominent place in his historical and devotional works, while relevant passages in the gospels, including John 3:5, and John 6, receive detailed treatment.

In this study, which is a brief introduction to the subject, we shall look at Ryle’s attitude to the sacraments in general, noting his repudiation of the charge that evangelicals disregarded the sacraments, his profession of a reverent regard for them, and a warning against an exaggerated, and often heretical, emphasis on them, both in their nature and effects.

## 2 REFUTING ALLEGATIONS ABOUT DISREGARD FOR THE SACRAMENTS

### 2.1 The Allegations

There is no doubt that Ryle felt the allegation about evangelical under-valuing of the sacraments very keenly, as he adverts to it in a number of places in his writings.<sup>(2)</sup> One of his most interesting allusions to this is in his historical work, *“Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century”*. He is discussing the impact made by the eighteenth century revivalists, and then comments, almost incidentally:

“To say, as others have done, that they neglected the sacraments, is simply false. Those who make that assertion only expose their entire ignorance of the religious history of England a hundred years ago.”<sup>(3)</sup>

Again, writing in his major polemical work, *“Knots Untied”*, he states:

“Now if there is any one thing that is laid to the charge of us Evangelical clergy, it is this, - that we deny sacramental grace. “Excellent, worthy, hard-working men,” we are sometimes called; “but unhappily they do not hold right Church views about the Sacraments.” - Men who talk in this manner are talking rashly, and saying what they cannot prove.”<sup>(4)</sup>

It is clear then, that “High Church” party felt that Evangelicals under-valued the sacraments in two ways; they had “low” views about the efficacy of the sacraments, and consequently neglected their administration. Ryle would allow neither allegation to go unanswered.

## 2.2 The Refutation

Regarding the alleged “low” view of the sacraments, the bishop responds:

“Evangelical clergymen yield to none in willingness to give rightful honour to Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. All we say is, that grace is not tied to the Sacraments, and that a man may receive them, and be none the better for it. And what is all this but the doctrine of the Thirty-nine Articles?” (5)

As to the neglect of the sacraments, Ryle indignantly defends the evangelical leaders of the eighteenth century against the charge:

“It would be easy to name men among the leading reformers of the last century whose communicants might be reckoned by hundreds, and who honoured the Lord’s Supper more than forty-nine out of fifty clergymen of their day. But beyond doubt preaching was their favourite weapon. They wisely went back to first principles, and took up apostolic plans. They held, with St.Paul, that a minister’s first work is “to preach the gospel.” ”(6)

## 3 EVANGELICAL ESTEEM FOR THE SACRAMENTS

In his introductory paper to *“Knots Untied”*, which he entitled “Evangelical Religion,”(7) Ryle affirms unequivocally:

“...Evangelical Religion does not undervalue the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. It is not true to say that we do. We honour them as holy ordinances appointed by Christ Himself, and as



blessed means of grace, which in all who use them rightly, worthily, and with faith, “have a wholesome effect or operation.”<sup>(8)</sup>

Again, in his exposition of Matthew 28:18-20, he comments on the Lord’s command about baptism:

“It is very difficult to conceive when we read this last command of our Lord’s, how men can avoid the conclusion that baptism is necessary, when it may be had. It seems impossible to explain the word that we have here of any but an outward ordinance, to be administered to all who join His church.”<sup>(9)</sup>

Similarly, with regard to the Lord’s Supper, he complains that it is “a means of grace...most shockingly neglected...by many churchgoers who never go to the Lord’s Table.”<sup>(10)</sup> This is a complaint from a bishop who clearly wishes the faithful to make use of the means of grace, and is grieved when they do not.

#### **4 WARNING AGAINST AN EXAGGERATED AND HERETICAL REGARD FOR THE SACRAMENTS**

##### **4.1 General Considerations**

It is at this point that Ryle extends himself, perhaps out of all proportion. Granted that the errors about the sacraments were serious and widespread, still one could have wished that he had affirmed his appreciation of them more extensively before launching his repeated and lengthy attacks on the errors. For example, in his paper on the Lord’s Supper in “*Knots Untied*”, the bishop engages in polemics for more than 80% of the paper, and devotes very little space to a straightforward exposition of the true doctrine.<sup>(11)</sup>

## 4.2 Exaggerated Regard for the Sacraments

Bishop Ryle expresses this warning most judiciously in one of his diocesan charges, as Bishop of Liverpool. He comments:

“Partly from a fear of not honouring the sacraments enough, partly from the pressure of modern teaching, there is a strong tendency to exalt Baptism and the Lord’s Supper to a place never given to them in Scripture, and especially not in the pastoral Epistles. ...Let us refuse to admit that they are the principal “*media*” between Christ and the soul - above faith, above preaching, above prayer, and above the Word.”<sup>(12)</sup>

Clearly, from the historical and literary context, the bishop’s concern is both pastoral and doctrinal. Exaggerated regard for the sacraments is neither doctrinally sound, nor pastorally helpful.

## 4.3 Heretical Views of the Sacraments

Again, Ryle gives plain and succinct guidance on this matter, insofar as it concerns the sacraments generally. We quote his comments in “Evangelical Religion”:

“...we steadily refuse to admit that Christ’s Sacraments convey grace *ex opere operato*, and that in every case where they are administered, good must of necessity be done...We protest against the idea that in baptism the use of water, in the name of the Trinity, is invariably and necessarily accompanied by regeneration. We protest against the practice of encouraging any one to come to the Lord’s Table unless he repents truly of sin, has a lively faith in

Christ, and is in charity with all men. We protest against the theory that the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice...And above all, we protest against the notion of any corporal presence of Christ's flesh and blood in the Lord's Supper, under the forms of bread and wine..'”(13)

## **5 CONCLUSION**

We now have a picture of how our evangelical champion regarded the sacraments generally. We now move on to a more detailed examination of the two sacraments, beginning with baptism.

## Part 7 The Church and the Sacraments

### Chapter 30

#### THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

“Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened, but it is also a sign of Regeneration or new Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed; faith is confirmed, and Grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God. The Baptism of Young children is in any wise to be retained in the Church, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ.”

(The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion: Article XXVII)

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

We have mentioned in our previous chapter the bitterness with which the doctrine of the Sacraments was contested in Anglicanism in the Nineteenth century, and this was true of both sacraments, baptism no less than the Lord's Supper. Our treatment of Ryle's standpoint on baptism will begin by setting the historical background, both within and outside Anglicanism, and will then move on to a presentation of Ryle's exposition of the doctrine, his polemical emphases, and an evaluation of his views.

## **2 THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

When John Charles Ryle wrote that “there is perhaps no subject in Christianity about which such difference of opinion exists as the sacrament of baptism”<sup>(1)</sup>, he could point to a wide variety of views extant in his own day!

### **2.1 The Anglo-Catholics and Baptism**

Bishop Ryle was undoubtedly correct when he summarised the Anglo-Catholic position on baptism thus:

”...they will tell you that the grace of the Holy Ghost invariably accompanies the administration of the ordinance, - that in every case, a seed of Divine life is implanted in the heart, to which all subsequent religious movement must be traced, - and that all baptized children are, as a matter of course, born again and made partakers of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>(2)</sup>

Ryle’s statement may be verified by reference to the Gorham case to which we have previously adverted.<sup>(3)</sup> “High Churchmen” like Samuel Wilberforce also believed in “Sacramental Grace” while opposing the other excesses of Anglo-Catholicism.<sup>(4)</sup>

### **2.2 Evangelical Churchmen and Baptism**

This we shall expound in Ryle’s presentation.

## **2.3 Baptists and Baptism**

Baptist confessions of the seventeenth century, while generally Calvinistic, understood baptism to be by immersion, and for professed believers only. For example, the Confession of 1689 states, *inter alia*:

“Those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in and obedience to our Lord Jesus, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance...Immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance.”<sup>(5)</sup>

Since that time, Baptists generally would acknowledge this as a standard expression of their faith.

## **2.4 Religious Bodies Denying the Necessity for Baptism**

For two hundred years, The Society of Friends had denied the necessity for baptism in water, and, currently, the newly-formed Salvation Army had adopted, though for different reasons, a similar position. It is against this background that our Anglican evangelical set forth his own convictions on this much controverted issue.

# **3 RYLE’S POSITIVE EXPOSITION OF THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM**

## **3.1 Areas of Consideration**

There were four facets of baptism to which Ryle wished to devote his attention, - its nature, mode, subjects, and its true place in religion.<sup>(6)</sup>

### 3.2 The Nature of Baptism

In his paper on Baptism, in *“Knots Untied”*, Ryle lists seven truths about the nature of baptism.<sup>(7)</sup> At this point we quote only those statements that are non-polemical, reserving notice of the others to a more appropriate stage in our study. As usual, we shall allow the teacher to speak for himself.

“[Firstly] baptism is an ordinance appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the continual admission of fresh members into His visible Church...

[Secondly] baptism is an ordinance of great simplicity. The outward part or sign is water, administered in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, or in the name of Christ.(sic) [This last addition is perplexing, and unexplained by Ryle.] The inward part, or thing signified, is that washing in the blood of Christ, and inward cleansing of the heart by the Holy Ghost, without which no one can be saved. The Twenty-seventh Article of the Church of England says rightly, - “Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened, but it is also a sign of regeneration or new birth.”

[Thirdly] baptism is an ordinance on which we may confidently expect the highest blessings, when it is rightly used. It is unreasonable to suppose that the Lord Jesus...would solemnly appoint an ordinance which was to be as useless to the soul as a mere human enrolment or an act of civil registration. The sacrament we are considering is not a mere man-made appointment, but an

institution appointed by the King of kings. When faith and prayer accompany baptism, and a diligent use of Scriptural means follows it, we are justified in looking for much spiritual blessing...”<sup>(8)</sup>

We may, then, summarise Ryle’s description of the nature of baptism as the means of entry into the visible church, a sign of forgiveness and regeneration, and a means of spiritual blessing (undefined) to the one who receives it rightly.

### **3.3 The Mode of Baptism**

Acknowledging that there is a wide divergence of opinion on the subject,<sup>(9)</sup> Ryle asserts that both affusion and immersion are valid means of baptism, in keeping with the teaching of the Church of England. As he puts it:

“I can find nothing in the Bible to warrant the assertion that either dipping, or pouring, or sprinkling, is *essential* to baptism...So long as water is used in the name of the Trinity, the precise mode of administration is left an open question...This is the view adopted by the Church of England.”<sup>(10)</sup>

His defence of this position entails a rebuttal of the Baptist position, and we will deal with that aspect in its proper place.

### **3.4 The Subjects of Baptism**

Ryle takes up the position that it is common ground for all Christians to acknowledge that all adult converts from paganism, in a “missionary” situation, should be baptized.<sup>(11)</sup>



The “rub” comes with the situation of the converts’ children. For Ryle, “if their fathers and mothers offer them to be baptized, the church ought to receive them in baptism, and has no right to refuse them.”<sup>(12)</sup> He continues: “Let me now supply a few simple reasons why I hold...that infant baptism is a right thing...”<sup>(13)</sup> He proceeds to argue as follows:

“(a) Children were admitted into the Old Testament Church by a formal ordinance, from the time of Abraham...That ordinance was circumcision. It was an ordinance which God Himself appointed, and the neglect of which was denounced as a great sin. It was an ordinance about which the highest language is used in the New Testament. St. Paul calls it “a seal of the righteousness of faith.” (Rom.ii.4.) Now, if children were considered to be capable of admission into the Church by an ordinance in the Old Testament, it is difficult to see why they cannot be admitted in the New. The general tendency of the Gospel is to increase men’s spiritual privileges and not to diminish them...

(b) The baptism of children is *nowhere forbidden in the New Testament*. There is not a single text, from Matthew to Revelation, which either directly or indirectly hints that infants should *not* be baptized. Some, perhaps, may see little in this silence. To my mind it is a silence full of meaning and instruction. The first Christians, be it remembered, were many of them by birth Jews. They had been accustomed in the Jewish Church, before their conversion, to have their children admitted into church-membership by a solemn

ordinance, as a matter of course. Without a distinct prohibition from our Lord Jesus Christ, they would naturally go on with the same system of proceeding, and bring their children to be baptized. But *we find no such prohibition!* That absence of a prohibition, to my mind, speaks volumes. It satisfies me that no change was intended by Christ about children. If He had intended a change He would have said something to teach it. But He says not a word! That very silence is, to my mind, a most powerful and convincing argument. As God commanded Old Testament children to be circumcised, so God intends New Testament children to be baptized.

(c) The *baptism of households* is specially mentioned in the New Testament. We read in the Acts that Lydia was baptized “and her household,” and that the jailer of Philippi “was baptized: he and all his.” (Acts xvi. 15, 33.) We read in the Epistle to the Corinthians that St. Paul baptized “the household of Stephanas.” (1 Cor.i.16.) Now what meaning would any one attach to these expressions, if he had no theory to maintain, and could view them dispassionately? Would he not explain the “household” to include young as well as old, -children as well as grown-up people? Who doubts when he reads the words of Joseph in Genesis, - “take food for the famine of your households” (Gen.xlii. 33); - or, “take your father and your households and come unto me” (Gen.xlv. 18), that children are included?...For my own part I cannot see how these questions can be answered without establishing the principle of infant baptism.

Admitting most fully that it is not directly said that St. Paul baptized little children, it seems to my mind the highest probability that the “households” he baptized comprised children as well as grown-up people.

(d) The *behaviour of our Lord Jesus Christ to little children*, as recorded in the gospels, is very peculiar and full of meaning. The well-known passage in St. Mark is an instance of what I mean. [Ryle then quotes Mark 10:13-16 in full.] Now I do not pretend for a moment to say that this passage is a direct proof of infant baptism. It is nothing of the kind. But I do say that it supplies a curious answer to some of the arguments in common use among those who object to infant baptism. That infants are *capable* of receiving some benefit from our Lord, that the conduct of those who would have kept them from Him was *wrong* in our Lord’s eyes, that He was ready and willing to bless them, even when they were *too young to understand* what He said or did, - all these things stand out as clearly as if written with a sunbeam! A direct argument in favour of infant baptism the passage certainly is not. But a stronger indirect testimony it seems to me impossible to conceive.’’(14)

Although Ryle indicates that he could “easily add to these arguments”(15), he contents himself with almost casual allusions to the testimony from proselyte baptism, and church history, without actually developing these arguments.(16)

We may say then, that Ryle’s basic arguments in favour of paedobaptism lie in the continuity of the covenant, (though he does not express himself in those

terms precisely,) the absence of any New Testament abrogation of the privileges of believers' children, the New Testament practice of "Household Baptism", and our Lord's own attitude to children, together with their capability of receiving divine blessing in spite of their tender years.

### **3.5 The True Position of Baptism in Religion**

#### **3.5.1 The Dangers of Imbalance**

With regard to this facet of the subject of baptism, Ryle is concerned that balance must be maintained. He believed that there were two dangers. First, there was the peril of despising baptism. He calls this, "the error of defect" arising from the misapprehension that because "in many cases, it seems to give no benefit...it can confer none."<sup>(17)</sup> Ryle opposes this error on the basis of the vast amount of material in the New Testament on the subject of baptism, to wit, the Lord's command, the apostolic practice, and the epistolary material about baptism.<sup>(18)</sup> He adds this warning: "Let us take heed, lest in fleeing from blind superstition, we are found equally blind in another way, and pour contempt on an appointment of Christ."<sup>(19)</sup>

On the other hand there was the danger of idolising baptism. As we have seen earlier, the Anglo-Catholic view, in Ryle's eyes, was close to idolatrous, in that the Anglo-Catholics adopted an *ex opere operato* position on the sacrament. Ryle calls this "the error of excess."<sup>(20)</sup>

#### **3.5.2 The Attainment of a Balanced View**

The bishop's attempt to arrive at a balanced view of the place of baptism in religion relies on three observations. Firstly, while baptism is frequently

mentioned in the New Testament, it is not a dominant *motif*, and is in fact not mentioned at all in fourteen of the New Testament epistles.<sup>(21)</sup> Secondly, while baptism is “spoken of with deep reverence [in Scripture] and in close connection with the highest privileges and blessings,”<sup>(22)</sup> it nevertheless mentions persons who are baptized, but are clearly unregenerate, and describes the regenerate (in the Johannine literature) in terms that are clearly not true of all baptized persons.<sup>(23)</sup> Finally, we

“discover that while baptism is frequently spoken of in the New Testament, there are other subjects which are spoken of much more frequently. Faith, hope, charity, God’s grace, Christ’s offices....redemption, justification, the nature of Christian holiness, - all these are points about which [we] will find far more than about baptism.”<sup>(24)</sup>

We will evaluate this presentation after considering Ryle’s polemical treatment of the doctrine.

#### **4 RYLE’S POLEMICAL TREATMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM**

Naturally, when dealing with such a controversial issue as baptism, Ryle would find it necessary to enter into debate with contrary views. His theological opponents were in two main camps - Ritualism and Anabaptism.

##### **4.1 Polemic against Ritualism**

If we may judge from the space given to each party, we are driven to the conclusion that our evangelical leader would have regarded the Ritualists as by far the more dangerous theological foe. He views this party as seriously

subversive of the true gospel. Insofar as this related to the sacrament of baptism. The Anglo-Catholic position of an *ex opere operato* efficacy of the sacrament was vulnerable, in Ryle's eyes, from a number of perspectives. We quote him at length:

“Baptism is an ordinance which, according to Scripture, a man may receive, and yet get no good from it. Can any one doubt that Judas Iscariot, Simon Magus, Ananias and Sapphira, Demas, Hymenaeus, Philetus, and Nicolas, were all baptized people? Yet what benefit did they receive from baptism? Clearly, for anything that we can see, none at all! Their hearts were “not right in the sight of God.” (Acts viii.21). They remained “dead in trespasses and sins,” and were “dead while they lived.” (Ephes.ii.1; 1 Tim. v.6.)...

Baptism is an ordinance which a man may never receive, and yet be a true Christian and be saved. The case of the penitent thief is sufficient to prove this. Here was a man who repented, believed, was converted and gave evidence of true grace, if any one ever did....And yet there is not the slightest proof that this man was ever baptized at all. Without baptism and the Lord's Supper he received the highest spiritual blessings while he lived, and was with Christ in paradise when he died! To assert, in the face of such a case, that baptism is *absolutely necessary* to salvation is something monstrous. To say that baptism is the *only* means of regeneration, and that all who die unbaptized are lost forever, is to say that which cannot be proved by Scripture, and is revolting to common sense....”(25)

In a word, the baptized may lack the grace of which the sacrament is a sign, and the unbaptized may be partakers of that grace apart from the sacrament.

But there is a further line of argument against the “mechanical” view of the operation of the sacrament. Such views “help forward the perilous and soul-ruining delusion that a man may have grace in his heart, while it cannot be seen in his life.”<sup>(26)</sup> How is this possible? Let us allow the bishop to explain.

“Multitudes of our worshippers have not a spark of religious life or grace about them. And yet we are told that they must all be addressed as regenerate, or possessors of grace, because they have been baptized! Surely this is dangerous!”<sup>(27)</sup>

Of course the Ritualists have their point of view, and their appeal to the scriptures as well. They could refer to the “sacramental” texts, such as Acts 2:38, or Acts 22:16 and so on. Ryle is not unaware of their approach, and undoubtedly is alluding to it in the following passage:

“Baptism is an ordinance which in Apostolic times went together with the first beginnings of a man’s religion. In the very day that many of the early Christians repented and believed, in that very day they were baptized. Baptism was the expression of their new-born faith, and the starting-point of their Christianity. No wonder that in such cases it was regarded as the vehicle of all spiritual blessings. The Scriptural expressions, “buried with Christ in baptism” - “putting on Christ in baptism” - “baptism doth also save us” -

would be full of deep meaning to such persons.(Rom.vi.4; Col.ii.12; Gal.iii.27; 1 Pet.iii.21.) They would exactly tally with their experience. But to apply such expressions indiscriminately to the baptism of infants in our own day is, in my judgment, unreasonable and unfair. It is an application of Scripture which, I believe, was never intended.’’(28)

Ryle’s argument is clear. Language suitable to real religious experience may not be used indiscriminately to apply to all baptized persons irrespective of their participation in such experience. And this of course is precisely what the Ritualist did. So much then, for Ryle’s debate with the “High” churchmen.

## **4.2 Polemic against Anabaptism**

Here there were two areas of debate - on mode, and on the proper subjects of baptism. Ryle is aware of the Baptist position on both issues, and deals with them both. Apart from his own positive presentation, disclosed above, he engages in an examination and refutation of his opponent’s standpoint.

### **4.2.1 On the Mode of Baptism**

Ryle recognizes that Baptist arguments in favour of immersion rest upon two premises, the meaning of the word “*baptizo*”, and the idea of being *buried* with Christ in baptism. As to the former, Ryle denies that the word always means “to immerse”. He says:

“The reply to this argument is short and simple. The assertion is utterly destitute of foundation. Those who are best acquainted with New Testament Greek are decidedly of the opinion that to baptize



means “to wash or cleanse with water,” but whether by immersion or not must be entirely decided by the context. We read in St. Luke (xi.38) that when our Lord dined with a certain Pharisee, “the Pharisee marvelled that He had not first washed before dinner.” It may surprise some readers, perhaps, to hear that these words would have been rendered more literally, “that he had not first been baptized before dinner.” - Yet it is evident to common sense that the Pharisee could not have expected our Lord to immerse or dip Himself over head [i.e. totally] in water before dining! It simply means that he expected Him to perform some ablution, or to pour water over His hands, before the meal. But if this is so, what becomes of the argument that to baptize always means complete “immersion”? It is cut from under the feet of the advocate of “dipping,” and to reason further about it is mere waste of time.”<sup>(29)</sup>

As to the argument from the analogy of burial, (as in Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12), Ryle simply makes the point:

“...there is no proof whatever that Christ’s burial was a going down into a hole dug in the ground. On the contrary, it is far more probable that His grave was a cave cut out of the side of a rock...and on a level with the surrounding ground. Such, at least, was the common mode of burying round Jerusalem. At this rate there is no resemblance whatever between going down into a bath, or baptistry, and the burial of our Lord. The actions are not like one another...to say that in “going down into the water” he is burying his body just

as His Master's body was buried in the grave, is to say what cannot be proved."<sup>(30)</sup>

#### 4.2.2 On the Subjects of Baptism

Here Ryle singles out two prevailing arguments employed by Baptists.<sup>(31)</sup> Firstly, there is no direct precept commanding the baptism of infants. Secondly, infants are incapable of repentance and faith, which are prerequisites to baptism.

As to the first, the bishop repeats, more or less, the argument he used in setting out his positive position on baptism<sup>(32)</sup>, and then makes the point:

“...the absence of some plain text or command is not a sufficient argument against infant baptism. There are not a few things which can be proved and inferred from Scripture, though they are not plainly and directly taught. Let the Baptist show us a single plain text which directly warrants the admission of women to the Lord's Supper. - Let him show us one which directly teaches the keeping the Sabbath on the first day of the week instead of the seventh...Any well-instructed Baptist knows that it cannot be done. But surely, if this is the case, there is an end of this famous argument against infant baptism! It falls to the ground.”<sup>(33)</sup>

Regarding the second argument, Ryle responds:

“In reply to this argument, I ask to be shown a single text which says that *nobody* ought to be baptized until he repents and believes. I shall ask in vain. The texts just quoted [Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38]

prove conclusively that grown-up people who repent and believe when missionaries preach the gospel to them, ought at once to be baptized. But they do not prove that their children ought not to be baptized with them, even though they are too young to believe. I find that St. Paul baptized “the household of Stephanas” (1 Cor. i.16); but I do not find a word about their believing at the time of their baptism. The truth is that the oft-quoted texts...will never carry the weight that Baptists lay upon them. To assert that they forbid any one to be baptized *unless* he repents and believes is to put a meaning on the words which they were never meant to bear. They leave the whole question of infants entirely out of sight. The text “nobody shall be baptized except he repents and believes,” would no doubt have been a very conclusive one. But such a text cannot be found!’’(33)

Further, he argues that there are totally unacceptable implications if the Baptist position is carried to its logical conclusion. As he expresses it: “I have seen many arguments against infant baptism, which, traced to their logical conclusion, are arguments against infant salvation, and condemn all infants to eternal ruin!’’(34) Ryle’s point is that the Scriptures show that children are capable of receiving grace, citing the case of John the Baptist<sup>(35)</sup>, and asks:

“Will any dare tell us that infants cannot be elect, -cannot be in the covenant, - cannot be members of Christ, - cannot be children of God, - cannot have new hearts, - cannot be born again, - cannot go to heaven when they die? - These are solemn and serious questions.

I cannot believe that any well-informed Baptist would give them any but one answer. Yet surely those who may be members of the glorious Church above, may be admitted to the Church below! Those who are washed with the blood of Christ, may surely be washed with the water of baptism!...Let these things be calmly weighed.’’(36)

So then, Ryle’s answer to Baptist objections to infant baptism is to be found in his understanding of the New Testament silence on the subject, his commitment to the Protestant principle that what may be justly inferred from Scripture may be taught as doctrine, and his challenge that a denial of infant baptism may involve, logically, the denial of infant salvation.

## **5 EVALUATION OF RYLE’S PRESENTATION AND POLEMIC**

### **5.1 General Considerations**

Ryle, on occasion, as we have seen<sup>(37)</sup>, was obliged to defend evangelicals against allegations of under-valuing the sacraments. While he denied the charges, his presentation of his view of baptism does indicate that he did not develop a theology of the sacraments as he did a theology of soteriology.

### **5.2 Evaluation of His Presentation**

His presentation, even allowing for his constant intention to write at a popular level, lacks the careful argumentation of, for example, his contemporaries, Hodge and Bannerman, though their works were available. While he is able to point to the parallels between Old and New Testament practice, he fails to stress the points of identity in the Old and New Testament church, and the

continuity of the covenant of grace. (See Galatians 3)

He also fails to show that the New Testament references to the children of believers place them in the same, or even an enhanced position of covenantal status, compared with children in the Old Testament.

### **5.3 Evaluation of His Polemic**

#### **5.3.1 His Polemic against Anabaptism**

One also feels bound to criticise his limited rebuttal to the Baptist arguments - it simply will not do to attempt a refutation of the Baptist view on the mode of baptism by appealing to one text of Scripture, and refuting a misinterpretation of another! His argument that the possible regeneration of infants provides a warrant for their baptism involves a serious *non sequitur*. While his point that infants may be recipients of grace is well taken, it does not necessarily imply that all infant children of professed believers may therefore be baptized. The warrant for such baptism is to be found in the precepts governing the external administration of the sacrament of the covenant of grace, not in presumptive regeneration.

#### **5.3.2 His Polemic against Ritualism**

Here again, while the arguments from Scripture, showing that grace may not be “tied” to the sacrament, are valid, his reaction to the texts relied upon by the ritualists is not so convincing, and lacks the serious theological and exegetical treatment that so large an issue demands.

## 6 CONCLUSION

In this long chapter, we have seen Ryle in his most polemical mood, and while one is sympathetic to his position, one could have wished for a more profound treatment of so controversial an issue. Nevertheless, he did strike some shrewd blows for the evangelical paedobaptist position, and provided his brethren with some tools for their task of defending their evangelical churchmanship.

### NOTE

Ryle's discussion of baptism involved him in extensive debate on the use of the word "regenerate" in the Book of Common Prayer, but as this does not, strictly speaking, and on his own admission<sup>(38)</sup>, relate to a theology of baptism drawn from Scripture, the details of it are not included here. Interested readers can find Ryle's extended treatment of the matter in his paper, "Prayer-Book Statements about Regeneration" in *"Knots Untied."*<sup>(39)</sup>

## Part 7 The Church and the Sacraments

### Chapter 31

#### THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

“The Supper of the Lord...is a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death: insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the Bread which we break is a partaking of the Body of Christ; and likewise the Cup of Blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ. Transubstantiation...in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions. The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith.” The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped.”

(The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion: Article XXVIII)

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

When Ryle penned his article on the Lord's Supper, in “Knots Untied,” he noted with sorrow: “It is painful to think that an ordinance appointed by Christ for our benefit should have been defiled by the din and smoke of theological controversy.”<sup>(1)</sup> Our study of the bishop's exposition of the doctrine will show that the controversy of which he wrote was never far away. We are obliged to give a brief resume of the conflict as it affected the religious life of Victorian England, after which we shall endeavour to expound Ryle's treatment of the subject, both in terms of his doctrinal presentation, and

his polemic against Rome and the Ritualists. We shall then round off the study with an attempted evaluation of Ryle's contribution.

## **2 THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

One of the major elements in the religion of the Anglo-Catholics of the second half of the nineteenth century was the insistence on the Real Presence of Christ in the elements - "His body and blood present under the forms of bread and wine,"<sup>(2)</sup> and, as such, to be worshipped.<sup>(3)</sup> This is, virtually, transubstantiation, and was a view strenuously resisted by evangelicals, as subversive of the gospel, and contrary to Article XXVIII of the Thirty-nine Articles. The propagation of this view led to acrimony of such a degree that there were several legal actions about it, during the period 1854-1858.<sup>(4)</sup> It is the writer's contention that the tone and emphasis of the evangelical champion's writings on the subject cannot be fully understood without keeping this ongoing furore before the mind.

## **3 THE EXTENT OF RYLE'S WRITINGS ON THE LORD'S SUPPER**

Bishop Ryle dealt with the subject extensively in "*Knots Untied*"<sup>(5)</sup>, and there is a detailed discussion of the Real Presence in part of a paper of the same title, which is also in "*Knots Untied*".<sup>(6)</sup> Another study is entitled "Thoughts on the Lord's Supper"<sup>(7)</sup>, of which a considerable part deals with practical consequences of right views of the Supper. He also deals with the subject in the appropriate sections of his "*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*"; including the following passages:- Matthew 26:26ff., Mark 14:22ff., Luke 22:19ff., and John 6, where he is at pains to refute the idea that the Lord's



Supper is in view.<sup>(8)</sup> Further, he refers to the subject in his historical studies, particularly in his papers on Wycliffe, and the reason for the martyrdom of the Reformers.<sup>(9)</sup> Significantly, he dealt with the subject at length in one of his episcopal charges,<sup>(10)</sup> and, perhaps most clearly of all, in “Questions about the Lord’s Supper,” a paper in a collection of miscellaneous addresses, “*The Upper Room*.”<sup>(11)</sup>

## **4 RYLE’S POSITIVE EXPOSITION OF THE LORD’S SUPPER**

The bishop’s view of the Lord’s Supper has two foci, the act of remembrance, and, less clearly, the believer’s “spiritual and heart communion with the sacrifice of Christ’s body and blood which was offered for his sins on the cross.”<sup>(12)</sup>

### **4.1 The Lord’s Supper a Remembrance**

#### **4.1.1 The Fact**

Ryle’s exposition of this aspect of the Supper is crystal-clear.

“It was ordained “for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and of the benefits which we receive thereby.” [The quotation is from the Church Catechism.] The bread broken, given, and eaten, was intended to remind Christians of Christ’s body given for our sins on the cross. The wine poured out and drunk was intended to remind Christians of Christ’s blood shed for our sins. The whole ordinance was intended to keep the Church in perpetual recollection of Christ’s death and substitution for us, and His atonement for our sins. Five times over in the Communion Office of

the Prayer Book, the words “memory” and “remembrance” are expressly used, to describe the principal object of the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>(13)</sup>

Similarly, in his paper, “Thoughts on the Supper of the Lord,” in *“Principles for Churchmen”*, he directs his readers to the two accounts, (Luke and I Corinthians) which:

“...tell us the reason which our Lord assigned why His disciples were to eat the bread and drink the cup: St.Paul and St.Luke both record the remarkable words, “Do this in remembrance of Me.”...When Scripture speaks so plainly, why cannot men be content with it? Why should we mystify [i.e. make mysterious or mystical] and confuse a subject which in the New Testament is so simple? The “continual remembrance of Christ’s death” was the one grand object for which the Lord’s Supper was ordained.”<sup>(14)</sup>

#### **4.1.2 The Reason**

The reason for the adequacy of remembrance as a sufficient purpose for the institution of the ordinance is set out by Ryle in his usual forthright way:

“Now, is it reasonable to suppose that our Lord would appoint an ordinance for so simple a purpose as the keeping His death in remembrance? Most certainly it is. Of all the facts in His earthly ministry none are equal in importance to that of His death. It was the great satisfaction for man’s sin, which had been appointed in God’s everlasting covenant from the foundation of the world...It was

the grand end and purpose for which Messiah came into the world...His death was our life. His death was the payment of our debt to God. Without His death we should have been of all creatures most miserable. No wonder that an ordinance was specially appointed to remind us of our Saviour's death. It is that very one thing of which poor, weak, sinful man needs to be continually reminded."<sup>(15)</sup>

At this point one has to ask why Ryle had to justify the sufficiency of "remembrance" as a cause for the ordinance. The answer surely lies in the Oxford Movement's return to patristic views of the sacrament, as expressed in the *Didache* and Ignatian literature. Here, the sacrament "brings Christians into union with their Lord...it is the great bond between them; and since it mediates communion with Christ, it is a medicine which procures immortality, an antidote against death which enables us to live in the Lord forever."<sup>(16)</sup> This aspect of the Supper is discounted by Ryle as "mystifying" what is actually simple, and so he is obliged to see "remembrance" as the primary act in the Lord's Supper. Of course, the "Catholic" view is also consonant with the idea of the Supper as a sacrifice, which was *anathema* to a good protestant like Ryle.

#### **4.2 The Lord's Supper and the Strengthening of Faith**

We have used this unusual description because Ryle, defending the protestant character of the sacrament, seems to have been chary of using any language that would leave the door open for a "Romanising" interpretation. For example, in his positive presentation of the doctrine in the works referred to

above, he avoids expressions such as “feed upon His body and blood”, although this expression is found in so Protestant a symbol as the Westminster Larger Catechism!<sup>(17)</sup> The following excerpt from his writings gives us an idea of how far he was prepared to go.

“The Lord Jesus Christ well knew the weakness and infirmity even of the holiest believers. He knew the absolute necessity of keeping them in intimate communion with His own vicarious sacrifice, as the Fountain of their inward and spiritual life. Therefore, He did not merely leave them promises on which their promises might feed, and words which they might call to mind, He mercifully provided an ordinance in which true faith might be quickened by seeing lively emblems of His body and blood, and in the use of which believers might be strengthened and refreshed. The strengthening of the faith of God’s elect in Christ’s atonement was one great purpose of the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>(18)</sup>

At the same time, our evangelical leader was quite willing to quote other authoritative sources regarding “feeding on Christ” in the Supper, but generally without explanatory comment. For instance, he is happy to quote the appropriate Homily at length to refute the idea of a corporeal presence of Christ.<sup>(19)</sup> However, although the quotation is full of suggestive material about the spiritual way in which the believer may feed on Christ, the bishop refrains from any elaboration of this. It must be admitted that Ryle’s failure in this area of exposition is, when viewed from today’s perspective, a weakness, but given his historical context, it is quite understandable.

## **5 RYLE'S POLEMICAL PRESENTATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER**

### **5.1 The Necessity for His Polemic**

In an article on the Oxford Movement in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, D.A.Rausch has stated:

“While the Oxford Movement was opposed in print by traditional churchmen as well as liberal academic thinkers, perhaps no one group matched the evangelicals in their enormous output of literature - printed sermons, tracts, articles, books and pamphlets against the Tractarians.”<sup>(20)</sup>

Undoubtedly, John Charles Ryle was in the vanguard of that assault! In the matter of the Holy Communion, he could not accept a “policy of compromise and toleration.”<sup>(21)</sup> Soon after his elevation to the see of Liverpool, the bishop found it necessary to issue a warning against “the growing disposition to sacrifice dogma on the altar of so-called unity, and to give up distinct doctrine for the sake of peace and co-operation.”<sup>(22)</sup> In a further address, much nearer the end of his life, he made it clear that the doctrine of the Lord's Supper was one of the dogmas that could not be given up in the interests of a chimerical unity. Any Anglican minister who:

“ignoring the public declaration which he made on taking a living, deliberately teaches transubstantiation, the sacrifice of the mass...is transgressing the liberty allowed by the Church of England. He may be zealous, sincere, earnest, and devout, but he is in the wrong place in a Protestant communion. He has stepped over the just limits of

the Church's comprehensiveness, and is occupying an untenable and unwarrantable position."<sup>(23)</sup>

## **5.2 The Elements in His Polemic**

The primary areas of Ryle's disagreement with, and opposition to, the Ritualistic doctrine were their doctrine that Christ is corporeally and materially present in the bread and the wine, their understanding of the sacrament as a sacrifice, their view that the minister at Holy Communion is a sacrificing priest, and their commitment to an *ex opere operato* efficacy of the sacrament.

### **5.2.1 Ryle and Transubstantiation**

The ritualists believed, as we have mentioned earlier in this chapter, in "the real...presence of... the body and blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, under the forms of bread and wine."<sup>(24)</sup> This, Bishop Ryle regarded as Romanism and a serious threat to the protestant Church of England. He affirms: "...the doctrine is substantially one and the same with that of the Romish Church, and that for refusing this very doctrine our martyred reformers laid down their lives."<sup>(25)</sup> Ryle's first line of attack is to refer to the 39 Articles. After quoting the 28th Article (quoted at the head of this chapter), the bishop characteristically asks for a straightforward comparison to be made between the Articles and High Church statements about the Lord's Supper. Using his gift of appealing to "common sense" he writes:

"I appeal to the common sense of all impartial and unprejudiced Englishmen. [obviously written before the days of the "new hermeneutic.']] Let them be the judges. If one view is right, the

other is wrong. If the language of the Twenty-eighth Article can be reconciled with the doctrine of Archdeacon Denison and his school, I can only say that words have no meaning at all.”<sup>(26)</sup>

His next ground of appeal is the Church’s liturgy. He writes:

“The Liturgy of the Church of England on this subject is entirely in accordance with the Articles. The word “altar” is not to be found once in our Prayer-book. The idea of a “sacrifice” is most carefully excluded from our Communion Office. However much men may twist and distort the words in the Baptismal Service, they cannot make anything out of the Communion Service, to prove Romish views... ..the rubric at the end of the Communion Service makes it mere waste of time to say anything more on the subject of the Prayer-book’s view of the Lord’s Supper. [There follows a long verbatim quotation of the rubric, which in the most explicit terms repudiates transubstantiation.] If that rubric does not flatly condemn the teaching of Archdeacon Denison and his school, about the presence of Christ in the sacrament, under the forms of bread and wine, I am very certain that words have no meaning at all.”<sup>(27)</sup>

Next, Ryle has to tackle the issue of the Church Catechism on the subject of the Real Presence. Now the words in the Catechism say that the inward part of the sacrament, “the thing signified”, is “The Body and Blood of Christ, which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord’s Supper.” Taken at face value, the words are capable of being interpreted in the Tractarian sense, a fact to which the explanatory addition by the “Irish

Articles” of 1615 testifies.<sup>(28)</sup> In tackling this, Ryle uses the rather precarious argument from silence, - “it [the Catechism] carefully avoids saying one word to sanction the idea that the body and blood are locally present in the consecrated elements of bread and wine.”<sup>(29)</sup> He then goes on to quote the protestant interpretation of the Catechism by Bishop Waterland.<sup>(30)</sup>

To be frank, this approach has serious weaknesses. It fails to state how Tractarians might use the passage, and fails to show that the passage is clearly not to be understood that way. One may contrast Neil and Willoughby’s careful historical study that totally refutes the Tractarian position.<sup>(31)</sup> Ryle is on firmer ground in drawing on the evidence from the Homilies of the church. These were official formularies, and are specifically recognized as authoritative in Article XXXV of the Thirty-nine Articles. The bishop quotes from the Homily on the Sacrament extensively, and the following excerpt from the Homily is particularly significant:

“It is well known that the meat we seek for in this Supper is spiritual food, the nourishment of our soul, a heavenly refection and not earthly, an invisible meat and not bodily, a ghostly substance and not carnal. So that to think that without faith we really enjoy the eating and drinking thereof, or that that is the fruition of it, is but to dream a gross carnal feeling, basely objecting and binding ourselves to the elements and creatures....when thou goest up to the reverend communion to be satisfied with spiritual meat, thou look up with faith upon the holy body and blood of thy God, thou marvel with reverence, thou touch it with thy mind, thou receive it with the hand



of thy heart, and thou take it fully with thy inward man.”<sup>(32)</sup>

Clearly, the Homily lends no support to the idea of a corporeal presence of Christ in the Supper.

Ryle rounds off his refutation of the Tractarian position by an appeal to two well-known Anglican divines, from widely divergent traditions, Jeremy Taylor and Archbishop Ussher, both of whom, he shows, oppose the idea of a Real Presence in the Romish sense.<sup>(33)</sup>

### **5.2.2 Ryle and the Minister as a Sacrificing Priest**

There is no question that Ryle was indignant at the way that the “Ritualists glory in calling every clergyman a sacrificing priest.”<sup>(34)</sup> His accusation was not without foundation. Even the gentle H.C.G.Moule, one of the most moderate of the evangelicals, feels bound to warn churchmen against a view of the Lord’s Supper in which “the ministrant priest, in the ritual...offers Him [Christ], to God”<sup>(35)</sup> To this heresy, Ryle felt obliged to respond.

In his “Questions about the Lord’s Supper,”<sup>(36)</sup> in response to the question, “Is the minister who consecrates the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper a priest?”, Ryle’s response, acknowledging that in the sense of “priest” being a diminutive for presbyter, the minister may be called a “priest”, goes on to say:

“...he is certainly not a priest, if we mean by that word one who offers up a sacrifice. He cannot be, because he has no sacrifice to offer, and a priest without a sacrifice is an unmeaning title. He cannot be, because Christian ministers are never once called

“priests” in the New Testament. The Jewish priests in the Old Testament had to offer sacrifices daily, and were types and figures of the great High Priest who was to come. But when Christ offered up Himself on the cross, a sacerdotal ministry was at once done away for ever. All believers are now “kings and priests,” because they “present their bodies a living sacrifice to God” (Rom.xii.1). But Christian ministers are not sacrificing priests, and cannot be. They are Christ’s ambassadors, messengers, witnesses, watchmen, shepherds, and stewards of the mysteries of God, but nothing more, whatever dress they may wear, and whatever title they may assume. Christians have only one Priest, even Him who is “passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God” (Heb.iv. 14).”(37)

Thus, by virtue of the cessation of the Old Testament priesthood, the uniqueness of Christ’s priesthood, the nature of the priesthood of all believers, and the absence of any sacrificial element in the Supper, the minister cannot be a “sacrificing priest.”

### **5.2.3 Ryle and the “Mechanical Operation” of the Sacrament**

In his Fourth Triennial Charge to the Diocese of Liverpool, in 1890, in which the bishop was exhorting his brethren to constancy in maintaining the evangelical faith, he refers to the deleterious effects of superstition about the sacraments. Describing the views of Rome about *ex opere operato* efficacy of the sacrament, he goes on:

“Thousands of English Churchmen, wittingly or unwittingly, seem to maintain practically the same view as the Church of Rome, and to attribute to the mere outward administration of the two sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper a kind of invariable influence and power, no matter how, or with what feeling, intention, heart and spirit, they are used.”<sup>(38)</sup>

This kind of superstition, the evangelical must resist. And Ryle does, in no uncertain terms.

“Now, to these extravagant views of the effect of the sacraments, I unhesitatingly assert that the Church of England gives no countenance at all. The Twenty-fifth Article declares plainly about both sacraments, that “in such only as worthily receive the same they have a wholesome effect or operation; but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves damnation.” The Twenty-eighth Article says: “To such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ, and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ.” The Twenty-ninth Article says: “The wicked, and such as be *void of a lively faith*, although they do carnally and visibly press with their teeth the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, yet in no wise are they partakers of Christ: but rather, to their condemnation, do eat and drink the sign or sacrament of so great a thing.” I do hope my Clergy in this day will stand firm on this subject...let us steadily refuse to admit that Christ’s sacraments

convey grace ‘*ex opere operato*,’...and that in every case where they are administered, good must of necessity be done, no matter how or by whom they are received...Above all, let us never encourage any one to suppose that he will receive any benefit from the Lord’s Supper, unless he comes to it with the qualifications laid down at the end of the Church Catechism, “with repentance for sin, and lively faith in Christ, and charity toward all men.”...To press men to become communicants who neither repent or believe, is no kindness, and does more harm than good.”<sup>(39)</sup>

## 6 EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

It is apparent that the subject of the sacraments is one that gives Ryle more scope as a polemicist than as an expositor. Despite his protestations to the contrary, he is perhaps lacking in a strong positive doctrine of the sacraments, and this is apparent in the vagueness with which he writes about the strengthening effect of believing participation in the Supper. At the same time, the English Reformation was rooted, in considerable measure, in a rejection of Rome’s view of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, and the bishop could see that the views and practices of the Ritualists was eroding that aspect of the Reformation. Hence the enormous expenditure of space given to the rebuttal of the Ritualists’ position. It may be that we have here a controversy that does not bear down so strongly on Anglicans now, but that is in part because so many of the objectives of the Ritualists have been achieved, and in whole sections of Anglicanism, a quasi-Roman view of the sacrament prevails. This of course is a tragic validation of Ryle’s concern and response!

## Part 8 Eschatology

### Chapter 32

# SECOND ADVENT, RESURRECTION, JUDGEMENT, ETERNITY

“Finally we believe, according to the Word of God, when the time appointed by the Lord...is come, and the number of the elect complete, that our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, corporally and visibly...with great glory and majesty to declare himself Judge of the living and the dead:...and then all men will personally appear before this great Judge...”

(The Belgic Confession: from Article XXXVII)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The eschatological emphasis in the writings of Bishop John Charles Ryle derives largely from his evangelistic and pastoral zeal. Eternity, and the issues of eternity, are never far away from the thoughts of this great Victorian evangelist. If he is writing of the return of Christ in glory, it is that he may ask “..whether you are ready to meet the Bridegroom, ready for Christ’s return.”<sup>(1)</sup> If he writes on heaven, he gives it a pastoral and evangelistic thrust, as in his paper, “*The Great Gathering*”, where he says:

“Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. He that hopes to be gathered with saints in heaven while he only loves the gathering of sinners on earth is deceiving himself....

If you are a true Christian...Your good things are to come. Your redemption draweth nigh. The night is far spent. The day is at hand.

Yet a little time, and he whom you love and believe on will come, and will not tarry. When He comes, He will bring His dead saints with Him and change His living ones. Look forward! There is a “gathering together” yet to come.”<sup>(2)</sup>

It is with this evangelistic and pastoral motivation in mind that we must examine Ryle’s eschatology. It will be convenient to follow the features of this according to the usual loci of the Second Advent, the Resurrection, the Judgement, and the Eternal State.

## **2 THE SECOND ADVENT**

### **2.1 Inadequate Views of the Second Advent**

In Ryle’s day, it is evident, there were views of the Second Advent that fell short of an expectation of Christ’s literal return, and the bishop refers to these in his sermon on “The Ten Virgins” in “The True Christian”.<sup>(3)</sup>

On one of the few occasions when he employs humour, or at the least, whimsy, he says:

“But I say...that the Church of Christ has gone on too long putting a strange sense on the passage which speaks of the coming of the Son of man in the New Testament. Some tell us that this expression always means death. No man can read the thousands of epitaphs on tombstones in which the Son of man’s coming is thrust in, and not observe how widespread this view is. Some tell us it means the conversion of the world. Some tell us it means the destruction of Jerusalem. That also is a very common way of interpreting the

expression with many. They find Jerusalem everywhere in the New Testament prophecies, and, like Aaron's rod, they make it swallow up everything else. Now I have no desire to underrate the importance of death, the conversion of the world, or the destruction of Jerusalem; but I must express my own firm belief that the coming of the Son of man is an entirely distinct subject from any of the three I have mentioned. And the acceptance they have met with I hold to be one more proof that in the matter of Christ's second advent the Church has slumbered and slept."<sup>(4)</sup>

## **2.2 Presentation of Ryle's View of the Second Advent**

Ryle does not go into enormous detail about the return of Christ. There are two basic truths he wishes to bring home; the Coming will be literal and personal, and the Coming will be sudden and unexpected.

### **2.2.1 The Advent will be Literal and Personal**

As always, the bishop writes plainly and unequivocally:

“The plain truth of Scripture, I believe, is as follows. When the number of the elect is accomplished, Christ shall come again to this world, with power and great glory. As He came the first time in person, so He shall come the second time in person; as He went away visibly, so He shall return visibly. Then shall be fulfilled those words of Acts i.: “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven”; and the words of Zechariah xiv.: “The Lord my God shall

come, and all the saints with Thee''; and the words of Enoch in Jude: "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints."'<sup>(5)</sup>

### **2.2.2 The Advent will be Sudden and Unexpected**

Ryle is insistent on this point, while recognizing that the concept is not likely to be popular. He puts it in his own inimitable way:

"I suspect men cling to the idea that there will be a kind of Saturday night in the world - a time when all will know the Lord's day [i.e. the Day of the Lord] is near, a time when all will be able to cleanse their consciences, look up their best garment, shake off their earthly business, and prepare to meet the Lord. If any one here has got such a notion I charge him to give it up for ever. If anything is clear in unfulfilled prophecy, this one fact seems clear, that the Lord's coming will be sudden, and take men by surprise; and any view of prophecy which destroys the possibility of its being a sudden event, appears to carry about with it a fatal defect.

Everything which is written in Scripture on this point confirms the truth that Christ's second coming will be sudden. "As a snare shall it come on the face of all them that dwell on the earth," says one place: "As a thief in the night," says another; "As the lightning," says a third; "In an hour when no man thinketh," says a fourth; "At a time when they shall be saying Peace and safety," says a fifth.



Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself uses two most striking comparisons when dwelling on this point. He says in one, that as it was in the days of Lot, so shall it be in the days when the Son of man is revealed. Do you remember how it was? In the days when Lot went out of Sodom the men of Sodom were eating and drinking, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage. The sun rose as usual. They thought of nothing but worldly things; they saw no sign of danger. But all at once the fire of God fell upon them and destroyed them. [Then follows the same lesson from the Flood.]...

Now, as the flood took the world by surprise, just so will the coming of the Son of man. It will come on men like a thunderclap. In the midst of the world's business, when everything is going on just as usual, in such an hour as this the Lord Jesus Christ will return."<sup>(6)</sup>

If space permitted we could show how Ryle makes powerful application of these truths about the Second Advent, as indeed is his custom in all his writings. We must, however content ourselves with merely indicating the main thrust of this. It is to bring home to his hearers and readers the effect of that Advent on them - the inescapable judgement that awaits the unconverted, (and in the context of the parable of the Ten Virgins, the nominal as opposed to real, Christian,) and the glorious blessing and security that will come to the righteous.<sup>(7)</sup>

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## **2.3 The Counsel to be Cautious about the Details of the Advent**

Ryle was no wild-eyed fanatic on the subject of the Return of the Lord. Addressing those who shared his opinions on the subject, he says:

“Be gentle in argument with those who differ. Remember that a man may be mistaken on the subject and yet be a bright child of God...Above all avoid dogmatism and positiveness, and specially about symbolical prophecy. It is a sad truth, but a truth never to be forgotten, that none have injured the doctrine of the second advent so much as over-zealous friends.”<sup>(8)</sup>

## **3 THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD**

In many respects, this appears to be a doctrine that Ryle accepted rather than expounded, and his most extended comments on the subject are found in a lengthy footnote to his comments on John 5:28-29, in *“Expository Thoughts on the Gospels.”*<sup>(9)</sup> The following quotations give the gist of his thought.

### **3.1 Elements Present in the Doctrine**

It is clear that Ryle believes John 5:28-29 to be of great importance for an understanding of the doctrine, because of the many truths about it enshrined in these two verses. As he puts it: “These words...contain one of the most distinct statements in Scripture of that great truth, - the resurrection of the dead.”<sup>(10)</sup>

#### **3.1.1 The Extent of the Resurrection - Universal**

“It [the resurrection] shall be universal, and not confined to a few only. “All” in the graves shall come forth, whether old or young, rich or poor.”<sup>(11)</sup>

### **3.1.2 The Agent of the Resurrection - Christ**

“It shall take place at Christ’s command and bidding. His “voice” shall be the call that shall summon the dead from their graves.”<sup>(12)</sup>

### **3.1.3 The Distinctions in the Resurrection**

#### **(a) In the Character of those Raised**

“There shall be a distinction of those who rise again, into two classes...those that have done good...those that have done evil.”<sup>(13)</sup>

#### **(b) In the Consequences for those Raised**

“Some shall rise to glory and happiness, - to what is called a “resurrection of life.” Some shall rise to be lost and ruined for ever, - to what is called a “resurrection of damnation.” ”<sup>(14)</sup>

## **3.2 Errors about the Resurrection Condemned**

During the second half of the nineteenth century (Ryle’s Notes on John were published in 1873) a number of heterodox opinions on eschatology were current. Under the impact of Darwin, Marx and others, supernaturalism itself was under renewed attack. Further, according to Berkhof, “since the middle of the [19th] century the doctrine of conditional immortality...enjoyed great popularity in some circles.”<sup>(15)</sup> And, of course, varieties of Origenist potential or actual universalism have always been with the church, although Farrar’s “Eternal Hope” was only to be published in 1878.<sup>(16)</sup> Ryle’s polemical trumpet gave a clear warning blast on all of these departures from orthodoxy!

### **3.2.1 The Error of Materialism**

“This passage condemns those who fancy that this world is all, and that this life ends everything, and that the grave is their conclusion. They are awfully mistaken. There is a resurrection and a life to come.”<sup>(17)</sup>

### **3.2.2 The Error of Denial of Condemnation of the Wicked**

“This passage condemns those who try to persuade us in the present day that there is no future punishment, no hell, no condemnation for the wicked in the world to come, - that the love of God is lower than hell, that God is too merciful and compassionate to punish any one. There is a “resurrection,” we are told, “of damnation.”<sup>(18)</sup>

### **3.2.3 The Error of “Conditional Immortality”**

“This passage condemns those who try to make out that resurrection is the peculiar privilege of believers and saints, and that the wicked will be punished by complete annihilation. Both here and in Acts xxiv.15 we are distinctly told that both bad and good shall rise again.”<sup>(19)</sup>

## **3.3 Application of the Doctrine**

Although this, strictly speaking, is a study in Ryle’s theology, it must always be borne in mind that his theology always had a practical end. We therefore close this section of our study of his eschatology with an excerpt from his exposition of John 5:28-29 that illustrates this.

“This passage is one of those that ought to sink down very deeply into our hearts, and never be forgotten. All is not over when men die. Whether they like it or not, they will have to come forth from their graves at the last day, and to stand at Christ’s bar. None can escape His summons. When His voice calls them before Him, all must obey.-When men rise again, they will not all rise in the same condition. - ...Not all will go to heaven. Not all will be saved...Thus it is written, and thus it must be. Let us make sure that we hear Christ’s quickening voice now, and are numbered among His true disciples. Let us know the privileges of true believers, while we have life and health. Then, when His voice shakes heaven and earth, and is calling the dead from their graves, we shall feel confidence, and not be “ashamed before Him at his coming.” (1 John ii.28.)<sup>(20)</sup>

#### **4 THE JUDGEMENT**

As in the matter of the resurrection, so Ryle takes the issue of a Judgement Day as axiomatic to any sound theology. His exposition scorns the possibility of there being no judgement,<sup>(21)</sup> and he is more concerned to draw clear lessons, with practical application, from this solemn doctrine. There are a number of theological truths which the bishop thus turns to good effect, and we set them forth accordingly.

## 4.1 The Certainty of Judgement

Let us hear our evangelical teacher as he expounds John 12:44-50, and draws out of it this great truth.

“Another thing shown in these verses is, the *certainty of a judgment to come*. We find the Lord saying, “He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not my words, hath One that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”

There is a last day! The world shall not always go on as it does now. Buying and selling, sowing and reaping, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage, - all this shall come to an end at last. There is a time appointed by the Father when the whole machinery of creation shall stop, and the present dispensation shall be changed for another....

There is a judgment coming! Men have their reckoning days, and God will at last have His...All, of every name and nation, and people and tongue, shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.”<sup>(22)</sup>

## 4.2 Christ will be the Judge

In his comments on Matthew 25:31-46, Ryle draws attention to this salient truth about the Day of Judgement.

“That same Jesus Christ who was born in the manger of Bethlehem,...who was condemned by the princes of this world, beaten, scourged, and nailed to the cross, - that same Jesus shall Himself judge the world, when He comes in His glory. To Him the

Father hath committed all judgment. (John v.22.) To Him at last every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord. (Philip.ii.10,11.)''<sup>(23)</sup>

### **4.3 The Universality of the Judgement**

Similarly, in the same paper, the bishop comments on the universality of the Judgment.

“All that have ever lived shall one day give account of themselves at the bar of Christ. All must obey the summons of the great King, and come forward to receive their sentence. Those who would not come to worship Christ on earth, will find that they must come to His great assize, when He returns to judge the world.”<sup>(24)</sup>

### **4.4 Judgment According to Works**

“The last judgment will be a judgment according to evidence. The works of men are the witnesses which will be brought forward, and above all their works of charity. The question to be ascertained will not merely be what we said, but what we did, - not merely what we professed but what we practised. Our works unquestionably will not justify us. We are justified by faith without the deeds of the law. But the truth of our faith will be tested by our lives. Faith which hath not works is dead, being alone. (James ii.11.)''<sup>(25)</sup>

### **4.5 The Issues in Judgment: Life or Condemnation**

“The last judgment will be a judgment that will bring joy to all true believers. They will hear those precious words, “Come, ye blessed

of my Father, inherit the kingdom.” They will be owned and confessed by their Master before His Father and the holy angels. They shall find that the wages He gives to His faithful servants are nothing less than a “kingdom.” The least, and lowest, and poorest, of the family of God, shall have a crown of glory, and be a king. The last judgment will be a judgment that will bring confusion on all unconverted people. They will hear those awful words, “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.” They will be disowned by the great Head of the Church before the assembled world. They will find that as they would sow to the flesh, so of the flesh they must reap corruption. They would not hear Christ, when He said “Come unto me, and I will give you rest,” and now they must hear Him say, “Depart, into everlasting fire.” They would not carry his cross, and so they can have no place in His kingdom.”<sup>(26)</sup>

## **5 THE ETERNAL STATE**

### **5.1 General Considerations**

It is unquestionable that the consideration of eternity, both as a corrective to pre-occupation with the mundane “here and now”, and as a reminder of the fixity and finality of the eternal state of the saved and the lost, looms large in Bishop Ryle’s thought. Sometimes he stresses this aspect to a degree that leaves him open to a charge of an unhealthy dualism. Karl Marx would have made merry over “the opiate of the people” had he read Ryle’s works. And yet, having said this, there is, in our day, taken up as it is with the pressures of



an existentially oriented mind-set, something refreshing in the reminder Ryle gives us of the dimension we too easily forget - eternity.

### **5.1.1 Eternity and Time**

This is the title that Ryle gives to the final paper in his book, *“Practical Religion.”*<sup>(27)</sup> In that work, before discussing the events that belong to eternity, the bishop contrasts with it the present world and its inhabitants. He reminds his readers:

*“We live in a world where all things are temporal and passing away. That man must be blind who cannot realize this. Everything around us is decaying, dying, and coming to an end...We are all going, going, going, whether high or low, gentle or simple, rich or poor, old or young. We are all going, and shall soon be gone.*

Humbling and painful as these truths may sound, it is good for us all to realize them and lay them to heart. The houses we live in, the homes we love, the riches we accumulate, the professions we follow, the plans we form, the relations we enter into, - they are only for a time. “The things seen are temporal.” “The fashion of this world passeth away.” (1 Cor. vii.31.)<sup>(28)</sup>

### **5.1.2 The Data for Evaluating Eternal Issues**

It is the present writer’s opinion that John Charles Ryle sounded a cautionary note in respect of human ideas about the eternal realm that we would do well to take into account. He acknowledges that “there are heights and depths about the subject of eternity which mortal man can never comprehend...”<sup>(29)</sup>

and then draws attention to a trap into which we creatures of time fall all too easily. To give the argument in his own words:

“The subject is one which we must never approach without the Bible in our hands. The moment we depart from “God’s Word written”, in considering eternity and the future state of man, we are likely to fall into error. In examining points like these we have nothing to do with preconceived notions as to what is God’s character, and what we *think* God ought to be, or ought to do with man after death. We have only to find out what is written. What saith the Scripture? What saith the Lord? It is wild work to tell us that we ought to have “noble thoughts about God”, independent of, and over and above, Scripture. Natural religion soon comes to a standstill here. The noblest thoughts about God which we have a right to hold are the thoughts which He has been pleased to reveal to us in His “written Word.” ”<sup>(30)</sup>

In other words, we are dependent, for our knowledge of the things of eternity, on Special Revelation, and must be bound by it. Human speculation can be given no rights in a realm of which it can claim no experience.

## **5.2 The Eternal Bliss of the Saved**

The bliss of the saved in heaven, for Ryle, consists of two primary elements, peace and happiness. As he writes in his paper, “Heaven”,<sup>(31)</sup>:

“Heaven shall be a place of perfect rest and peace. They that dwell *there* have no more conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil;

their warfare is accomplished, and their fight is fought; at length they may lay aside the armour of God, at last they may say to the sword of the Spirit, Rest and be still...*There* the wicked must cease from troubling; *there* sin and temptation are for ever shut out..."<sup>(32)</sup>

### 5.3 The Eternal Punishment of the Wicked

#### 5.3.1 Declaring the Doctrine

While the future of the elect was not a matter for controversy, the eternal misery of the reprobate was an issue much in the minds of Christians of Ryle's day. Apart from Farrar in the Church of England, R.W.Dale, a leading Congregationalist, had written against the idea of everlasting punishment<sup>(33)</sup>, and the matter was being hotly debated. In such a situation, Ryle could not equivocate. Plainly and clearly he stated:

“Let us settle it, for another thing, in our minds, that the *future misery* of those who are finally lost is eternal. This is an awful truth, I am aware, and flesh and blood naturally shrink from the contemplation of it. But I am one of those who believe it to be plainly revealed in Scripture, and I dare not keep it back in the pulpit. To my eyes eternal future happiness and eternal future misery appear to stand side by side. I fail to see how you can distinguish the duration of one from the duration of the other. If the joy of the believer is for ever, the sorrow of the unbeliever is also for ever. If heaven is eternal, so likewise is hell..."<sup>(34)</sup>

## 5.3.2 Defending the Doctrine

### 5.3.2.1 Biblically

“I cannot reconcile the non-eternity of punishment with *the language of the Bible*. Its advocates talk loudly about love and charity, and say that it does not harmonise with the merciful and compassionate character of God. But what saith the Scripture? Who ever spoke such loving and merciful words as our Lord Jesus Christ? Yet His are the lips which three times over describe the consequence of impenitence and sin, as “the worm that never dies and the fire that is not quenched.” He is the Person who speaks in one sentence of the wicked going away into “everlasting punishment” and the righteous into “life eternal.”(Mark ix.43-48; Matt. xxv.46.) - Who does not remember the Apostle Paul’s words about charity? Yet he is the very Apostle who says, the wicked “shall be punished with everlasting destruction.”(2 Thess.i.9.) - Who does not know the spirit of love which runs through all St.John’s Gospel and Epistles? Yet the beloved Apostle is the very writer in the New Testament who dwells most strongly, in the Book of Revelation, on the reality and eternity of future woe. What shall we say to these things? Shall we be wise above that which is written? Shall we admit the dangerous principle that words in Scripture do not mean what they appear to mean? Is it not far better to lay our hands on our mouths and say, “Whatever God has written

must be true.” “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgments.” (Rev.xvi.7.)”<sup>(35)</sup>

### 5.3.3 Practically

The bishop writes out of real concern for the preservation of the truth and the halting of the spread of a fatal lie. He goes on:

“...I must speak according to the light which God has given to me; and I do not think I should do my duty if I did not raise a warning voice on this subject, and try to put Christians on their guard. Six thousand years ago sin entered into the world by the devil’s daring falsehood, - “Ye shall not surely die.” (Gen.iii.4.) At the end of six thousand years the great enemy of mankind is still using his old weapon, and trying to persuade men that they may live and die in sin, and yet at some distant period may be finally saved. Let us not be ignorant of his devices. Let us walk steadily in the old paths. Let us hold fast the old truth, and believe that as the happiness of the saved is eternal, so also is the misery of the lost.”<sup>(36)</sup>

### 5.3.4 Theologically

“Let us hold it fast *in the interest of the whole system of revealed religion*. What was the use of God’s Son becoming incarnate, agonizing in Gethsemane, and dying on the cross to make atonement, if men can finally be saved without believing on Him? Where is the slightest proof that saving faith in Christ’s blood can ever begin after death? Where is the need of the Holy Ghost, if

sinner are at last to enter heaven without conversion and renewal of heart? Where can we find the smallest evidence that anyone can be born again, and have a new heart, if he dies in an unregenerate state? If a man may escape eternal punishment at last, without faith in Christ or sanctification of the Spirit, sin is no longer an infinite evil, and there was no need for Christ making an atonement.”<sup>(37)</sup>

On these three lines, then, biblically, practically, and theologically, Ryle defends this controverted article of the faith. The defence is spirited, forthright, and avowedly unsubtle. It is clear that he had little patience with subtleties that suggested that “words in Scripture do not mean what they appear to mean”! Interestingly enough, Ryle adds a lengthy postscript to the article, in which he interacts with Farrar’s book “Eternal Hope”, stating that, having read the book, he “laid down the volume with regret and dissatisfaction, unconvinced and unshaken in my opinions.”<sup>(38)</sup> He accuses Farrar of one-sidedness in emphasising the benevolence of God, to the disadvantage of His attributes of holiness and justice. He further indicates that Farrar deals inadequately, or sometimes not at all, with such issues as the vileness of sin in God’s sight, the need for regeneration and its apparent impossibility after death, and instances in Scripture of the manifest wrath of God, as in the Flood and the destruction of Sodom.<sup>(39)</sup>

## **6 CONCLUSION**

In this brief survey of Ryle's eschatology, we have found him, as usual, orthodox to the point of being traditional, yet courageously uncompromising in the face of a rising tide of denial and infidelity. As ever, he argues plainly and unequivocally, and one is left in no doubt as to his position. One also notes his wise words on the need to be guided by special revelation in a field where human opinion can only be speculative. With this study, our examination of Ryle's theology, section by section, has come to an end. It remains for us to highlight its basic features, evaluate it, and to ascertain the abiding lessons it holds for today. To this we now turn.

## CHAPTER 33

### OVERALL SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

“It was “dogma” in the apostolic ages which emptied the heathen temples, and shook Greece and Rome. It was “dogma” which awoke Christendom from its slumbers at the time of the Reformation, and spoiled the Pope of one-third of his subjects. It was “dogma” which, a hundred years ago, revived the Church of England in the days of Whitfield, Wesley, Venn, and Romaine, and blew up our dying Christianity into a burning flame. It is “dogma” at this moment which gives power to every successful mission, whether at home or abroad. It is doctrine - doctrine, clear ringing doctrine - which, like the rams’ horns at Jericho, casts down the opposition of the devil and sin. Let us go on clinging to “dogma” and doctrine, whatever some may please to say; and we shall do well for ourselves, well for others, well for the Church of England, and well for Christ’s cause in the world.”<sup>(1)</sup>

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

It is words like those above that give us an insight into the significance that Bishop Ryle found in doctrine. For him, it gave sinews to the preaching and practice of Christianity, and all the previous pages of this thesis bear witness to its importance in his ministry. As we come to the end of this long study, it remains for us to summarise the leading features of his theology, his way of expressing it, the questions raised as to its strengths, weaknesses and adequacy, and, finally, a look at its relevance for us today, whether as a guide or a beacon.



## 2 THE LEADING FEATURES OF RYLE'S THEOLOGY

### 2.1 A Biblical Theology

Even the most cursory examination of Ryle's theological work reveals its dependence on Scripture. Sometimes this is overtly evident, as in those places where he gives a catena of Scriptures to establish a doctrinal position. His presentation of the doctrine of Election is a case in point.<sup>(2)</sup> At other times we are taken to individual scriptures, as in his teaching on regeneration, and we are shown their particular significance.<sup>(3)</sup> Then again, sometimes our great evangelical gives the whole sweep of the biblical story to make his point. Such is the case in his exposition of that aspect of human depravity in which he treats of the heart as the seat of sin.<sup>(4)</sup> Indeed, he exemplifies the truth of his claim about the evangelical view of the authority of Scripture:

“The supreme authority of the Bible, in one word, is one of the corner-stones of our system. Show us any thing plainly written in that Book, and, however trying to flesh and blood, we will receive it, believe it, and submit to it.”<sup>(5)</sup>

Whether Ryle's use of Scripture was always judicious, or whether in fact he was sometimes “biblicist” rather than “biblical”, we shall consider in its proper place, in our critical evaluation. At this point we are merely making a descriptive analysis. This analysis clearly shows that Ryle's theology is dependent primarily on Scripture for its authority.

## 2.2 An Orthodox Theology

In using “orthodox”, we mean a theology that is in keeping with the authorised formularies of the Church of England. That of course includes the Ecumenical Creeds (*vide* Article VIII), the Thirty-nine Articles, the Church Catechism, and the Homilies. To a lesser extent it also includes the Book of Common Prayer, which Ryle insisted must be subordinated, as a liturgical work, to the more formal doctrinal confession. To quote him directly:

“I honour and love the Book of Common Prayer, but I do not call it the Church’s Confession of faith. I delight in it as an incomparable manual of public worship, but if I want to ascertain the deliberate judgment of the Church upon any point of doctrine, I turn first to the Articles.”<sup>(6)</sup>

Examples of his appeals to the Thirty-nine Articles and Symbols abound, and we may note this in his treatment of the Authority of Scripture,<sup>(7)</sup> the doctrine of Election,<sup>(8)</sup> and particularly the doctrine of the Sacraments.<sup>(9)</sup>

As to his use of the other formularies of the Church, his language is redolent of the liturgy, over and over again (although this is only apparent to those well-acquainted with it, as were his original readers), and of course he appeals to its statements when insisting on the centrality of the atonement,<sup>(10)</sup> and on the description of the Lord’s Supper as an act of remembrance,<sup>(11)</sup> to quote but two examples. Whether his commitment to orthodoxy was over-scrupulous, and became a mere traditionalism, is another question which we shall handle in due course.

### **2.3 A Selective Theology**

As we intimated at the beginning of this work, Ryle's writings were occasional, pastoral, polemical and evangelistic in character, so that we do not have a well-rounded theology in terms of proportionate treatment of every locus. As can be seen from the thesis, he places his emphasis on subjects that are relevant to his pressing concerns. Thus his treatment of the doctrine of God is much less thorough than, say, his discussion of regeneration or the atonement. The issue of whether his selectivity amounts to dangerous imbalance, we shall consider presently.

### **2.4 A Protestant Theology**

It is clear from almost all Ryle's writings that his perspective is that of committed protestantism. We take the liberty of asking the reader to see this as axiomatic, and so on the face of Ryle's work as to render present proof unnecessary. It is also evident that the bishop's protestantism is militant, and that raises the question of whether he betrayed some bigotry in his attitude to Rome in his writings. This also is something we shall consider in the appropriate place.

### **2.5 An Evangelical Theology**

By the middle of the Nineteenth century, in England Protestant and Evangelical were no longer synonyms! For example, while all evangelicals were by definition protestant, not all Anglicans who were opposed to Rome or to Anglo-Catholicism were evangelical. John Henry Newman had no more bitter opponent than Charles Kingsley, but the latter would never have seen

himself as an evangelical. In fact he was committed to a form of Christian Socialism, and an admirer of Maurice.

John Charles Ryle, on the other hand, was unashamedly evangelical. There is hardly a subject on which he wrote, or a doctrine that he expounded, where this evangelicalism does not shine through. As we have seen, whether writing on the attributes of God, or the meaning of baptism, Ryle is evangelical, first, last, and all the time. Again, our thesis has so established this fact that further evidence is not called for. The question that this raises, is whether Ryle was so wedded to the evangelical party as to be blind to the value of other insights within and outside Anglicanism. Again, we shall look at this in due course.

## **2.6 A Polemical Theology**

As our study has shown, Ryle was continually “fighting on two fronts” against what he termed “the Pharisees and Sadducees” - the Ritualists and the Liberals. This sense of theological conflict is frequently present in the great evangelical’s work, particularly when he is dealing with the doctrine of Scripture, the atonement, and eternal punishment. As we have seen, his polemic thrusts are usually in two directions.<sup>(12)</sup>

## **2.7 A Pastoral, Applicatory Theology**

We have frequently averred that Bishop Ryle had a pastor’s heart which is reflected in his theology. Although we have restricted our excursions into this area, (which could well be a fruitful field for further study), enough has been written to show that the bishop was not content with mere orthodoxy in doctrine, without a close application of the truth to the conscience, heart and

will. When he is seeking to remove misunderstanding about the doctrine of election, for instance, he is concerned to show that without pastoral safeguards the doctrine may endanger unstable souls.<sup>(13)</sup> Again, his description of the New Birth<sup>(14)</sup>, as we pointed out, is “theological truth on fire...reaching the reader or hearer with persuasive power.”<sup>(15)</sup> It is this distinctive feature in Ryle’s work that can teach us much today.

### **3 RYLE’S METHOD AND STYLE OF PRESENTATION**

It is this writer’s contention that one of the reasons for Ryle’s phenomenal success as a religious writer was his method and style of presentation. Fashions change, and we are far from saying that his style is entirely suited to today’s readers (though many have been struck by the way he “wears well”). Nevertheless, his publications were well received and have passed through many editions.<sup>(16)</sup> What were the qualities that pervaded his style of presentation?

#### **3.1 Simplicity**

We may take any of the lengthy quotations in this thesis, and we shall discover that Bishop Ryle is at pains to be understood. Even when he is explaining the true nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son as expressed in John 5:28-29<sup>(17)</sup>, he puts the issues in the plainest possible terms. The present writer can testify to the effectiveness of this simplicity of presentation in the enthusiastic way that members of a previous parish responded to Ryle’s works. The question this raises is whether Ryle’s simplicity is in danger of degenerating into jejuneness. We address this issue later in this study.

### **3.2 Unequivocalness**

Closely allied to the idea of simplicity is Ryle's consistently straightforward method of presentation. There are no ambiguities; as he expressed it to his new diocese, "Let us pray that there may be always found in this Diocese a trumpet which shall give "no uncertain sound." "(18) Surely that prayer was answered! One might disagree with Ryle's position; one is never in doubt as to what he means, and what his position is! It is evident that the bishop hated equivocation, and he was determined that it should not be laid to his charge.

### **3.3 Repetition as a Didactic Method**

Years of pastoral experience probably convinced Ryle that a truth would be best remembered if "hammered home" by repetition. So we have found that he used this method, not tediously, but with the intention of producing a cumulative effect. It is not so much that he says the same thing over again, as that he uses different lines of evidence to emphasise the same truth. We have referred to his presentation of the truth of sin having its seat in the heart, and in adverting to that again, we remind the reader of the relentless way that Ryle drives his point home. First are the plain texts of scripture; these are followed by biblical examples of communities, families and individuals. Nor does he rest there; he last of all points to human absorption with the temporal, contrasted with almost total neglect of the eternal issues.<sup>(19)</sup> It is this kind of repetition by diversity that is often so compelling in his argument.

### 3.4 Hortatory Style

The reader will have noted that sometimes Ryle's presentation of his theological insights is hardly judicious. He often adopts the style of an advocate rather than a judge. Now the difference between these two callings is that the advocate is not merely interested in the niceties of the issues; he has a case to win! And that is largely true of Ryle's expositions - they set out to persuade, not merely to inform. But even then, there is a second battle to win - the reader must not only be persuaded, he must respond with heart and mind and will! The evangelist often casts his shadow on the teacher in the bishop's writings, and if not the evangelist, then the pastor! The evangelist cannot teach regeneration without asking pertinent questions about the presence of life in the reader; the pastor cannot teach about the errors of Anglo-Catholics on the question of the sacraments without warning of the dreadful effects of *ex opere operato* views on the church and on the individual. Of course, one has to ask whether this ardent advocacy reduces Ryle's objectivity, and we will ask that question in due course.

## **4 A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF RYLE'S THEOLOGY**

### **4.1 General Considerations**

As we approach this penultimate and crucial part of our thesis, in which we attempt a constructive, yet not uncritical assessment of Ryle's theology, it is necessary to clear the ground, so to speak, and indicate certain parameters to our evaluation.

Firstly, we wish to make our evaluation of Ryle in the context of his own day. He cannot be expected to write with the insights of the post-Victorian era, but must be evaluated against the background of his own theological environment.

Secondly, the usefulness of his works must be evaluated in terms of the audience he was seeking to reach. It is idle to assess Ryle's theological contribution as though his work was written for professional theologians, if the particular constituency being addressed was the laity of his parish, or interested but private Christians without formal theological training. On the other hand, if he is writing or speaking to his peers, then we may criticise that which we find inadequate to the occasion.

Thirdly, it is necessary that our evaluation take cognizance of our sympathy with, or antipathy for the overall theological position that Ryle held. It is impossible to attain total objectivity, but there must be an honest attempt to recognize our presuppositions, and take them into account in arriving at a final assessment.

The extent to which this evaluation meets the above criteria remains to be seen!



## **4.2 Alternative Perceptions of Ryle's Theology**

As we have intimated in our description of the bishop's theology and method of presentation, there are certain elements in his work that are so strongly oriented to a certain perspective that they might lay him open to the charge of distortion. The questions to be asked are whether Ryle is truly biblical or merely biblicist? Is he zealous for orthodoxy or sterilely traditional? Is he merely understandably selective in his emphases or unbalanced in restricting his theological interests? Is he an uncompromising defender of the Protestant faith or guilty of bigotry?

Turning to his churchmanship, we must ask whether he is a doughty evangelical or a "party" man?

As far as his style and method of presentation are concerned, is Ryle a man with a gift for simple expression, or is he merely jejune? Is he a master of legitimate advocacy of his cause, or is he simply one-sided? These are, it seems to us, the issues to be addressed. As must be apparent, we are, broadly speaking, very sympathetic to the evangelicalism that Ryle represents, and admire the man himself greatly. It is idle to pretend otherwise. Nevertheless, we shall endeavour to deal honestly with the issues at stake.

### **4.2.1 Biblical or Biblicist**

According to Ferdinand Deist, "Biblicism" treats the Bible "as an immediate source of divine revelation; hence a tendency to adhere to the letter of the biblical text without considering the context or historical background of individual verses."<sup>(20)</sup>

Strictly speaking, we shall have to find Ryle “guilty as charged” in many instances, notably in his texts on Perseverance and Election,<sup>(21)</sup> where his selection of scriptures is somewhat arbitrary. However, in many other places, and in particular in his *“Expository Thoughts”*; his remarks do take into account context. Further, where a text clearly teaches truth which is not affected by the context, (say, for example, John 3:3 on regeneration, or Mark 10:45 on the atonement,) explanation of the context would be pedantic and time-wasting, both attributes antithetical to Ryle’s character as a writer! Also, even when Ryle’s fault in this area is acknowledged in part, it was a “sin” of his times, especially in popular writing. One may cite the great Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon as an example of a man with a clear theology, truly biblically based, whose sermons were sometimes anything but expositions of the text in its context and in its original sense. As one who admires Spurgeon’s work tremendously, the present writer is confident that scarcely a sermon of Spurgeon’s does not contain allusions to scriptural texts that are “accommodated” to the message. (Footnoting at this point would be tedious, as the phenomenon is so common as to be notorious!) The following sections of this thesis provide clear examples that Ryle is not generally facilely biblicist - his treatment of the doctrine of the depravity of man, his exposition of both the importance and extent of the atonement, and his treatment of the sacrament of baptism.

#### **4.2.2 Soundly Orthodox or Sterilely Traditional**

At the outset, it needs to be stated that Ryle did not live in an age of orthodoxy. During his ministry he saw practically every area of traditional

protestant orthodoxy challenged. As we have shown, the Inspiration and Authority of Scripture, the Deity of Christ, the substitutionary character of the atonement, the nature and efficacy of the sacraments, the nature of the Ministry, and the doctrine of eternal punishment were all under attack. This assault was from both ends of the theological scale - “Catholic” and “Liberal”, and his was not the hour for being theologically adventurous! In this writer’s view, for Ryle to have been innovative and imaginative in his theology would have been an enterprise fraught with danger, and would have prevented him from engaging in one of his most important ministries, that of “steadying the ship” in the theological storms that beset it. Of course, this adherence to “the old paths” would not be popular in the intellectual and philosophical climate of his day, but, as must be clear to the reader, popularity was not courted by this evangelical prophet, any more than by Amos or Jeremiah!

On this point, let us hear the bishop in the Preface to his work *“Old Paths”*; in order that we may understand his position correctly. The quotation is necessarily lengthy.

“The name which I have selected will prepare the reader to expect no new doctrines in this volume. It is simple, unadulterated, old-fashioned Evangelical theology. It contains nothing but the “Old Paths” in which the Apostolic Christians, the Reformers, the best English Churchmen for the last hundred years, and the best Evangelical Christians of the present day, have persistently walked. From these “paths” I see no reason to depart. They are often

sneered at and ridiculed, as old-fashioned, effete, worn out, and powerless in the Nineteenth Century. Be it so. “None of these things move me.” I have yet to learn that there is any system of religious teaching, by whatever name it may be called, High, or Broad, or Romish, or Neologian, which produces one quarter of the effect on human nature that is produced by the old, despised system of doctrine which is commonly called Evangelical...The longer I live the more I am convinced that the world needs no new Gospel, as some profess to think. I am thoroughly persuaded that the world needs nothing but a bold, unflinching teaching of the “old paths.” The heart of man is the same in every age. The spiritual medicine which it requires is always the same. The gospel which was preached by Latimer, and Hooper and Bradford, - by Hall, Davenant, Usher, Reynolds, and Hopkins, - by Manton, Brooks,...Owen and Gurnall, - by Romaine, Venn, Grimshaw... - this is the gospel which alone will do real good in the present day....”(22)

We may, or may not agree with Ryle’s assessment. Nevertheless, it is clearly his perception, and the principle upon which he acted. In the circumstances, it must be acknowledged that his exposition of the faith was not traditional, for the sake of tradition, but because he saw the old theology as the best! The present writer’s standpoint is that of Ryle’s, but we do feel that sometimes he betrays a “nervous hyper-orthodoxy.”(23)

Summing-up, we do not see Ryle’s orthodoxy as unimaginative traditionalism, although it is possible that a fresh expression of that orthodoxy that inter-acted

with the contemporary movements might have been more helpful. But even here, one has to ask whether his constituency would have been in a position to appreciate such an approach.

#### **4.2.3 Wisely Selective, or Unduly Narrow in Theological Emphasis**

Our study of Ryle's theology has shown that while he is expansive in some areas of his theological output, he has little to say in others, and this leads us to ask whether this is indicative of undue narrowness of thought on his part.

In answering this question we have to remember that Ryle was not setting out to be a systematic dogmatician, but rather a defender of the evangelical faith, a faithful pastor, a watchman set to guard the faithful against false teaching, and an evangelist. Any assessment of his work has to take this into account. The question is not whether the bishop wrote extensively on all areas of theology, or whether he wrote adequately in the areas that could justly be regarded as his concern. It is our contention that on this basis, he must be seen as generally adequate, except in the sphere of responding to the implications of Darwin's evolutionary hypothesis, and the claims of the "Higher Critics". These are of course, major factors, but in Ryle's defence it must be remembered that in respect of Darwin, more professional theologians than Ryle "made their peace" with evolution without any acknowledged diminution of the most rigorous orthodoxy. B.B. Warfield is a notable example. As for the "Higher Critics", Ryle had not ignored their attack on Scripture, but had counselled his clergy to treat their findings and speculations with cautious reserve.<sup>(24)</sup>

With the exception of these two factors, Ryle's emphases are entirely defensible. In his conflict with Anglo-Catholicism, he had no need to expound what they held in common; in his conflict with the Liberals, there was little point in expounding what to them would have been irrelevancies. And in expounding the evangelical message, whether doctrinally, devotionally or evangelistically, it is obvious that he would concentrate on those elements in theology related to such exposition. There is one serious defect in Ryle's presentation, which we see more easily in our day, and that is his reluctance to apply his theology to the social and political ethos of his day. This thesis is not directly concerned with this, but we note it as a possible field for further research.

#### **4.2.4 Uncompromising Protestantism or Bigotry**

Nothing in this thesis is clearer than the uncompromising Protestantism of John Charles Ryle. At times his condemnation of Rome is very outspoken; her claims and insidious methods are never far from his thoughts. We have examined this thoroughly in a previous work<sup>(25)</sup>, and we refer the reader to the exposition there for a justification of Ryle's fervour on the subject. However, we may recapitulate one or two salient features of that defence. The first is the historical situation in Ryle's day, when many Anglo-Catholic clergy and other leaders were defecting to Rome, and others were propagating doctrines and practices indistinguishable from the ways of the Papacy.

As Herbert Carson has said, in his preface to the recent edition of *“Light from Old Times”*: “The re-establishment of the Roman diocesan system in England and the changed face of Anglicanism pointed ominously for Ryle towards an ultimate submission to the papacy.”<sup>(26)</sup>

The other factor to be remembered was Ryle’s conviction that the ideals and doctrines of the Reformation were a priceless heritage, and the loss of that heritage would destroy both Church and nation. These, taken together, so far as this writer is concerned, give ample justification for Ryle’s strong Protestantism.

#### **4.2.5 An Evangelical Theology or a “Party-Spirited” Theology**

That Ryle was a committed evangelical, is, of course, beyond question. However, each of the distinctive groupings in nineteenth Century Anglicanism could become a “Party” in an ecclesiastical political sense, and it was easy for supporters of a group simply to be blind to the virtues of others merely because they differed from them theologically. Was Bishop Ryle guilty of this? We think not. As evidence, we point to his repeated acknowledgement of the principle of the church’s comprehensiveness, both in his spoken and written words. In his first charge to the new Diocese of Liverpool, on 19th October 1881, he says, quite unequivocally:

“I have long maintained, and still maintain, that every well-constituted National Church ought to be as comprehensive as possible. It should allow large liberty of thought within certain limits. Its “necessaria” should be few and well-defined. Its

“non-necessaria” should be very many. It should make generous allowance for the infinite variety of men’s minds, the curious sensitiveness of scrupulous consciences, and the enormous difficulty of clothing thoughts in language which will not admit of more than one meaning. A sect can afford to be narrow and exclusive: a National Church ought to be liberal, generous, and as “large-hearted” as Solomon. (I Kings 4.29.) Above all, the rulers of such a church should never forget that it is a body of which the members, from the highest minister down to the humblest layman, are all fallen and corrupt creatures, and that their mental errors, as well as their moral delinquencies, demand very tender dealing. The great Master of all Churches was One who would not break a bruised reed or quench smoking flax (Matt.12.20), and tolerated much ignorance and many mistakes in His disciples. A National Church must never be ashamed to walk in His steps... To comprehend and take in, by a well-devised system of scriptural Christianity, the greatest number of Christians in the nation, ought to be the aim of every National Church. To these principles, as an English bishop, I mean to adhere.

Comprehensiveness, such as I have described, I believe to be a *peculiar characteristic* of the National Church of England. We have within our pale three widely different “schools of thought,” the old historical schools, commonly called High and Low and Broad. They are schools which have existed for nearly three centuries, and,



unless human nature greatly alters, I believe they will exist as long as the Church of England stands. [Ryle then names some of the divines from these schools, through the centuries.] What reading man does not know that these divines differed widely about many subjects; about the Church, the ministry, and the sacraments; about the meaning of some words and phrases in the Prayer-book; about the relative place and proportion they assigned to some doctrines and verities of the faith? But they all agreed in loving the Church of England, in thanking God for her Reformation, in maintaining her protest against the Church of Rome, in using her forms of worship, and in labouring for her prosperity. They could pray and praise together...With all their shades of opinion, they were “honest Churchmen,” and there was room in our pale for all. This is what I call the practical comprehensiveness of the National Church, and as a Bishop, I do not want to see it altered and narrowed.”<sup>(27)</sup>

Now, we ask, does that sound like a sectarian spirit? And this note is sounded by the bishop on more than one occasion. Hear him in his *“Expository Thoughts”* on Mark 9:38-41. The passage deals with the man casting out devils, whom the disciples reprov’d, “because he followeth not with us.” Hear our expositor on this incident:

“We see in these verses, *the mind of Christ on the great subject of toleration in religion.*“Jesus said, Forbid him not; for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us, is on our part.”

Here is a golden rule indeed, and one that human nature sorely needs, and has too often forgotten. men of all branches of Christ's Church are apt to think that no good can be done in the world, unless it is done by their own party and denomination...Let us be on our guard against this feeling. It is only too near the surface of all our hearts. Let us study to realize that liberal, tolerant spirit which Jesus here recommends, and be thankful for good works wheresoever and by whosoever done....Is our neighbour warring against Satan? Is he really trying to labour for Christ? This is the grand question. Better a thousand times that the work be done by other hands than not done at all.”(28)

Again we ask, where is the sectarian in Bishop Ryle? There is a large-heartedness and catholicity of spirit in him that is surely admirable. But there is a limit to a church's comprehensiveness. Ryle expresses this in the charge we quoted earlier. Once more, a lengthy quotation is helpful.

“Now I contend that the National Church of England has set up wisely-devised limits to its comprehensiveness. These limits, I believe, are to be found in the Articles, the Creeds, and the Book of Common Prayer. If, therefore, a minister of the National Church maintains and teaches those distinctive doctrines of the Church of Rome which are plainly named, defined, and repudiated in the Thirty-nine Articles, and ignoring the public declaration which he made on taking a living, deliberately teaches transubstantiation, the sacrifice of the Mass, purgatory, the necessity of auricular

confession, and the invocation of saints; or if he administers the Lord's Supper with such usages and ceremonies that few persons can distinguish it from the Romish Mass; then, and in that case, I contend that he is transgressing the liberty allowed by the Church of England. He may be zealous, sincere, earnest and devout, but he is in the wrong place in a Protestant communion. He has stepped over the just limits of the Church's comprehensiveness, and is occupying an untenable and unwarrantable position. By those limits I mean to abide, and my clergy must not expect me to sanction any transgression of them."<sup>(29)</sup>

Now we maintain that there is nothing sectarian, or party-spirited, in expecting those who voluntarily bind themselves to a confessional standard to abide by their vows, or leave! It is a travesty of justice to condemn a church leader on a charge of sectarianism, when he is simply endeavouring to protect the flock, and maintain credible standards of doctrinal discipline in the church. So we affirm quite unequivocally that Ryle is innocent of the charge of "party-spirit" in his writings.

#### **4.2.6 A Simple, or Simplistic Theology**

Here the issue of historical context and the characteristics of Ryle's constituency are of paramount importance in making our assessment. As we have seen, until the publication of *"Essays and Reviews"* in 1860, the general Christian public held traditionally conservative views about Scripture and theology.<sup>(30)</sup> Much of Ryle's work was written for such a constituency, and it was hardly to be expected that one who shared their views on the

inspiration of Scripture was going to teach them the truth and oppose the “Philistines” in the “Saul’s armour” of an intellectual approach to the subject. He had already determined, as he shows in a paper on “Simplicity in Preaching,”<sup>(31)</sup> to cultivate a simple style in preaching. In that paper, he commends to the clergy, the use of “simple words”, “a simple style of composition”, “a direct style”, and “plenty of anecdotes and illustrations.”<sup>(32)</sup> This thesis provides ample evidence that Ryle practised what he preached! But simplicity is not jejuneness. It is true that today his apologetic for the inspiration of Scripture may sound simplistic (although he makes some telling points!), but in his own day and judged by the approach of the majority in that day, he could not justly be charged with naivete of expression. If he lacks subtlety, it is not because he is incapable of it, but because it suited neither his temperament nor his objective.

#### **4.2.7 Advocacy or One-sidedness**

We have noted above Ryle’s zealous advocacy of the evangelical cause, and asked the question whether this advocate-spirit made him one-sided. Now, of course, in the courts, the advocate is one-sided! He has a case to win; jurors and a judge to persuade. It is not dishonesty that is the issue; it is whether the case is credibly one worth defending. For the evangelical bishop, the gospel was eminently worth defending. He poured his vast talents and unflagging energies into defending it and propagating it; in advancing its cause, and in defeating its enemies. If that is one-sidedness, then the bishop is guilty. At least he knew which side he was on, and was concerned for its triumph. It is all very well to accuse Ryle of being less than judicious; it is worth while

remembering that soldiers do not generally fight judiciously! However, when every allowance has been made, it cannot be denied that Ryle does not always do justice to the arguments of his opponents, and in the long run what is valuable and true in their position will be seen, irrespective of any attempts to ignore or side-step it. It is our contention that if Ryle is one-sided, he is not dishonest. That is, he does not misrepresent his opponents' views. He is, however, less than fair in stating their views without giving a full picture of their biblical, historical, or intellectual motivation, and this is a serious weakness. As to his motivation in this omission it is unwise to speculate.

### **4.3 Summary of the Evaluation**

It is apparent from our comments that we largely endorse both Ryle's approach and methodology. That this stems, to a considerable extent from our evangelical like-mindedness, we do not doubt, but it is our conviction that on any charitable reading of the evidence, our standpoint is legitimate.

## 5 RYLE'S MESSAGE FOR TODAY

### 5.1 Our Presuppositions and the Relevance of Ryle's Message

When we engage in an historical/theological study of this character, there is always the temptation to ask if a recounting of past wars, of past arguments, of largely abandoned issues, has any relevance for our modern "global village" with its new socio-economic problems, its religious pluralism and relativism. Of course, we may say, nobody doubts the old bishop's sincerity and even his eloquence, but does what he said really matter any more?

Our answer to that question will depend upon our own view of the message that Ryle was at such pains to defend and propagate. The present writer, for the past thirty-eight years, has shared Ryle's evangelical faith, and like his mentor, believes that, as the good bishop expressed it in the concluding pages of *"Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century"*:

"...the true remedy for all the evils of our day is the same remedy that proved effectual a hundred years ago -the same pure unadulterated doctrine that the men of whom I have been writing used to preach, and the same kind of preachers...We want nothing but the old truths rightly preached and rightly brought home to consciences, minds, and wills...The good that has been done in the world, however small, has always been done by evangelical doctrines."<sup>(33)</sup>

In a word, Ryle is relevant because the gospel is relevant. It is recognized that there is here a revelation of presuppositional commitment; so be it. Certainly, if Ryle's message is not relevant, then he can only serve to illustrate the

findings of cultural anthropology. If, as we affirm, his message is relevant, then it will give pointers to us to enable us to proclaim that message in our own generation.

## **5.2 Ryle's Emphasis on Doctrine**

The fact that we have had sufficient material for this lengthy thesis is evidence of the importance of doctrine in Ryle's ministry. Although his interests are evangelistic and pastoral, he shows us that such a ministry cannot be adequately sustained without a strong dogmatic, especially in those areas that pertain to the substance, engendering and nurture of faith.

In this he contrasts sharply with much of modern evangelism, which is notoriously "light" on theological content. Our evangelism needs substance and weight; a theology as strong as Ryle's would supply it.

## **5.3 Ryle's Uncompromising Commitment to Truth**

It is obvious that many of Ryle's contemporaries would have disagreed strongly with him. It is equally true that they were aware that their opinion or goodwill, their contempt or admiration, would never move the old champion from his position. He would not sell his soul for popularity; all that mattered to him was the truth as he saw it. As he expresses it in his preface to "*Old Paths*":

"If those who hold Evangelical views were only more faithful to their own principles, and more bold, and uncompromising, and decided, both in their preaching and their lives, they would soon

find, whatever infidels and Romanists may please to say, that they hold the only lever which can shake the world.”<sup>(34)</sup>

This witness is true. And nobody has been more sturdy in holding firmly to his convictions than good bishop Ryle. We live in a day that has seen the emergence of the neo-evangelical. This kind of Christian is anxious that our evangelicalism should be relevant and credible, and of course he is right. But it is this writer’s perception that the relevance is being purchased too dearly, at the expense of truth. This last twenty years has seen a weakening on inspiration, the lostness of the heathen, the doctrine of eternal punishment, and, recently, substitutionary atonement - all in the name of relevance and obtaining the acceptance of a scholastic community that is very small in relation to world Christendom. Ryle would never have tolerated such a compromise. We may learn from him!

#### **5.4 Ryle’s Simplicity of Presentation**

It is hoped that this thesis will have shown that there is little of obscurity in Ryle’s theology. Where there is mystery he acknowledges it; for the rest he sets it out as simply as possible, always remembering the compelling need to be understood, if he hopes to be believed. We are not calling for a major revision in style in serious and scholarly works of theology for the college student, but we are aware that unless we write plainly for the flock, they may well be scattered in confusion, despairing of coming to terms with our high-flown language, and nearly incomprehensible concepts. We, like Ryle, must preach the deep things of God, as occasion calls, but, again like him, we must be at pains to be understood.



## **5.5 Ryle's Submission to Scripture**

This hardly needs to be spelt out. Ryle could write authoritatively because he lived under authority, - the authority of the Word of God. If we jettison Scripture as the foundation of our theology, we shall lose the only element that can make our message an instrument for real good. Ryle is exemplary in this regard, and we need this emphasis today.

## **5.6 Ryle's Urgency of Presentation**

It is impossible to read Ryle impassively. This exercise has been for the writer more than academic; time and again one has been swept along by his proclamation of the truth, and the student has become the catechumen, and the scholar the penitent. If this has happened in what might be called an academic atmosphere, what must the impact have been on his original hearers and readers? His presentation of truth always demands response. Is ours like this? The church cannot expect to be taken seriously unless it declares its message with the note of urgency.

## **5.7 Ryle's Skill in Argument**

Time and again this study has been struck by Ryle's skill in making the most of his case. He knows how to marshal his arguments, how to lay down line after line of evidence, and how to make the most telling point. He uses relentless collation of various kinds of evidence to buttress his argument; he calls in history, confessions of faith, the pragmatic and the ideal. All is grist for his mill in the great work of persuasion and conviction. The church needs to emulate him; it must not assume that a presentation that lacks weight will persuade.

## **5.8 Summary of the Section**

In these few paragraphs, we have sought to show how Ryle can instruct the church of today in its evangelistic and pastoral ministry. If the academic discipline has been smothered by these practical considerations, we ask indulgence. This thesis cannot be merely an academic exercise if we take seriously the reality of the Christian faith.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This thesis has had for its subject the theology of John Charles Ryle. It is the writer's conviction that this theology is worthy of exploration for historical reasons, as an investigation of the religious thought of a typical, though outstanding, Victorian evangelical. It is also valuable for the study of pastoral theology, as giving us a picture of the methods adopted by an able minister a century ago. The writer trusts that he will not be considered guilty of gross subjectivism if he affirms his conviction that the study is most valuable because it uses the past to point the way to a restoration of the church's effectiveness in the world, as a servant of the saving Word, both the inscripturated Word, and the Word made flesh!

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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# FOOTNOTES

## GENERAL

- 1 All quotations of Scripture are from the Authorized (King James) Version, unless otherwise stated.
- 2 Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from the written works of J.C.Ryle - full details of these works are listed in full, in a separate bibliography, which also gives the abbreviated form used in the footnotes.
- 3 Unless otherwise stated, all italicised or underlined words in quotations, are in the original.
- 4 All standard abbreviations used are as described in *The New Collins Concise English Dictionary of the English Language*, Editor, McLeod, W.T., Collins, London and Glasgow, 1982
- 5 All material in quotations in square brackets is added by the writer, and does not form part of the original quotation.
- 6 The Reference Technique adopted in this thesis is largely that recommended by the University of South Africa (Fifth Revision) compiled by P.J.A.Roux, 1981



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## CHAPTERS 1 and 2 (General)

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- 7 P.Toon and M.Smout, op.cit. p23
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- 4 Ibid. p380
- 5 See Herbert Spencer's Social Statics, quoted by J.Orr, The Christian View of God and the World: Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1897, p167 Orr also has the following note: (p168-169) "Mr.Fiske says: "Thus we see what human progress means. It means throwing off the brute-inheritance, - gradually throwing it off through ages of struggle that are by and by to make struggle needless... The ape and the tiger in human nature will become extinct. Theology has had much to say about original sin. This original sin is neither more nor less than the brute-inheritance which every man carries with him, and the process of evolution is an advance towards true salvation."
- 6 See D.Lyon, Karl Marx: Tring: Lion Publishing, 1979, Chapter 2, for a Christian analysis of Marx's position.
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- 5 Ibid. p7
- 6 Ibid. (emphasis mine)
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## CHAPTER 15

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- 2 Notoriously, Seeley, in “Ecce Homo”, and Colenso in his commentary on Romans
- 3 Knots Untied p4
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q. & A. 25)
- 6 Expository Thoughts Volume 3 (Part 1) p27
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- 10 Ibid. p251
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- 13 Ibid. p252-254
- 14 Ibid. 254-255
- 15 All these are found in Old Paths p255-258
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- 20 Ibid. p1174 For a sympathetic portrait of Maurice and his beliefs, see D.L.Edwards, Leaders of the Church of England, 1828-1978: London: Hodder and Stoughton p155-180
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- 3 See Articles II and XXXI, which both use universal terminology, as indeed Scripture does in John 1:29 and I John 2:2, without thereby implying actual universal atonement.
- 4 D.S.Allison, op.cit. p76
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- 7 Ibid p60-61
- 8 Ibid p142
- 9 Ibid p159
- 10 Ibid p364
- 11 Ibid (Part 2) p197
- 12 Ibid (Part 1) p61 Quotations which follow are not footnoted where they appear in the original extensive quotations above)
- 13 Expository Thoughts, Volume 3 (Part 1) p364
- 14 Ibid p156
- 15 Italics mine
- 16 Italics and underlining mine
- 17 Quoted in J.I.Packer, Introductory Essay to John Owen’s Death of Death in the Death of Christ: Choteau, Montana: Gospel Mission Press, 1980, p17
- 18 J.I.Packer, op.cit. p9
- 19 Ibid p7

## CHAPTER 17

- 1 The Doctrinal Standards and Liturgy of the Reformed Dutch Church - Cape Town, J.H.Rose 1876
- 2 Knots Untied p192-205
- 3 Ibid.p196
- 4 Old Paths p436-457
- 5 Ibid.p441
- 6 Knots Untied p197
- 7 Expository Thoughts Volume 4 (Part 2) p185
- 8 Knots Untied p197
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.p197-198
- 11 Expository Thoughts Volume 3 (Part 2) p411
- 12 Knots Untied p198
- 13 Ibid.p198-199
- 14 Ibid.p199
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- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid.p203
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.p199-200
- 20 Ibid.p212
- 21 Ibid.p206-218
- 22 Ibid.p214-215

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- 1 Old Paths p 458-475
- 2 Ibid. p461
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid. p466
- 6 W.Von Loewenich, Martin Luther, the Man and His Work: Minneapolis:Augsburg Publishing House,1986 p82
- 7 Old Paths p462
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- 11 Ibid. p463
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- 14 D.N.Steele, and C.C.Thomas, The Five Points of Calvinism Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1971 p31ff
- 15 See comments of Dr. Lloyd-Jones in the Foreword to Ryle's book Holiness (1956 Edition) ” The Bishop had drunk deeply from the wells of the great classical Puritan writers of the seven-teenth century”
- 16 Old Paths p465
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid. p467
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid. p467-468
- 22 Ibid. p468
- 23 Ibid. p468-469

24 Ibid. p469-470

25 Ibid. p470-471

26 Ibid. p471

## CHAPTER 19

- 1 The Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 10: Section 1
- 2 Knots Untied p87-102; The True Christian Chapters 2,3, and 4  
Expository Thoughts Volume 3 (Part 1) p120-123;126-139
- 3 For extended discussion, see S.C.Carpenter,op.cit.p196-203
- 4 Knots Untied p87-102
- 5 Ibid.p87
- 6 Ibid.p88-89
- 7 Ibid.p89
- 8 The True Christian p23-24
- 9 Ibid.p31-32
- 10 Knots Untied p90-91
- 11 The True Christian p32-35
- 12 Ibid.p32-33
- 13 Expository Thoughts Volume 3 (Part 1) p122
- 14 The True Christian p33
- 15 Ibid.p33-34
- 16 Ibid.p34
- 17 L.Berkhof, Systematic Theology p477
- 18 Knots Untied p92-93
- 19 The Book of Common Prayer Service for the Public Baptism of Infants
- 20 Knots Untied p103-129

## CHAPTER 20

- 1 Westminster Confession Chapter XV Sections 1 and 2
- 2 Old Paths p402 - 435
- 3 Expository Thoughts Volume 1 (Part 2) p7-8 and Volume 3 (Part 2) 109-111
- 4 Ibid. Volume 1 (Part 2) p7-8
- 5 Old Paths p404-405
- 6 Ibid. p405
- 7 Ibid. p406
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid. p406-407
- 11 See the General Confession in the Service of Holy Communion in the Book of Common Prayer of 1662. The exact words are: "...the remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable."
- 12 Ibid. p407
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid. p409
- 15 Ibid. p410
- 16 Ibid. p407-408
- 17 Ibid. p408; 410
- 18 Ibid. p410



## CHAPTER 21

- 1 The Thirty-nine Articles; Article 11
- 2 “Justification” in Old Paths p211 - 238; and “The Lord our Righteousness” in The True Christian p79-96
- 3 The True Christian p81-83 4 Ibid.p84-85
- 5 Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. & A.22
- 6 Old Paths p215
- 7 Ibid.p215-216
- 8 The Belgic Confession Article XXII
- 9 Old Paths p220
- 10 Ibid.p220-221
- 11 Ibid.p221
- 12 See also Ryle’s evangelistic exposition of the same truth in The True Christian - article “The Lord our Righteousness” p89-90
- 13 The Belgic Confession Article XXII
- 14 Old Paths p227
- 15 Ibid.p228-229
- 16 Ibid.p227-228
- 17 Ibid.p228
- 18 See Chapter 19 supra

## CHAPTER 22

- 1 The Westminster Confession of Faith: Chapter XVIII; Section 1
- 2 The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion : Article 17
- 3 See the discussion in L.Berkhof: Systematic Theology p507-509
- 4 Holiness p107
- 5 Ibid. p100-134
- 6 Ibid. p103
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Decrees of the Council of Trent: Decree concerning Justification Chapter 9: Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation Edited by M.A.Noll, Leicester: Inter Varsity Press 1991, p178 (Italics mine)
- 9 Holiness p103
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid. p103-104
- 13 Ibid. p104-105
- 14 Ibid. p105-106
- 15 Ibid. p106
- 16 The Book of Common Prayer The General Confession at Morning and Evening Prayer
- 17 Holiness p106-107
- 18 Ibid. 107
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid. p107-108
- 22 Ibid. p108-109

## CHAPTER 23

- 1 The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion Article 17
- 2 The Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter XIII Section 1
- 3 Knots Untied p1-19
- 4 Ibid. p5-6
- 5 Ibid. p68-86
- 6 Ibid. p84
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 M.L.Loane, op.cit.p72
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Holiness p12
- 11 Ibid. p ix.
- 12 W.Walsh, The Secret History of the Oxford Movement: Sixth Edition, London: Church Association, 1899 p245
- 13 Ibid. p401
- 14 Ibid. p283
- 15 Holiness p25-26

## CHAPTER 24

- 1 Holiness p16
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid. p17
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid. p18
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid. p18-19
- 8 Ibid. p24
- 9 Ibid. p20
- 10 Ibid. p20
- 11 J.Murray, Collected Writings: Edinburgh:The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977 Volume 2 p280; see pages 277-293
- 12 Ibid. p294-304
- 13 Holiness p20-21 Elsewhere in his writings, Ryle discusses how the “Means of Grace” benefit the believer.
- 14 Ibid. p21-22
- 15 Ibid. p22-23
- 16 Ibid. p23-24

## CHAPTER 25

(All quotations from ‘Holiness’ by J.C.Ryle)

- 1 Holiness p24
- 2 Ibid.
3. Ibid. p25
4. Ibid. p27
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid. p27-28
7. Ibid. p28-29
8. Ibid. p29-30
9. Ibid. p30
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid. p30-31

## CHAPTER 26

- 1 The Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter XVII Section 1
- 2 Old Paths p476-521
- 3 Ibid. p478-479
- 4 Ibid. p479-480
- 5 Ibid. p480-481
- 6 Ibid. p481-482
- 7 Ibid. p483-484
- 8 Ibid. p488
- 9 Ibid. p488-492
- 10 Ibid. p492
- 11 Ibid. p495,496
- 12 Ibid. p496 footnote
- 13 Ibid. p493
- 14 Ibid.

## CHAPTER 27

- 1 The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion Article XIX
- 2 See Principles for Churchmen Chapters 1 & 2
- 3 Knots Untied p168-191
- 4 Preface to Knots Untied (1896 edition)
- 5 Knots Untied p6
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid. p168
- 8 L.Berkhof, Systematic Theology p556-557
- 9 Knots Untied p169-171
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- 11 Ibid. p171-172
- 12 Ibid. p172
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid. p173
- 17 Ibid. p173-174
- 18 Ibid. p175
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 See Ibid.
- 21 Ibid. p175-176

## CHAPTER 28

- 1 The Book of Common Prayer: Bishop's Charge to Ordinands
- 2 Knots Untied p8-9
- 3 See Ryle's comments in "Thoughts on the Ministry" in Principles for Churchmen p152-153
- 4 Principles for Churchmen p151-152
- 5 Ibid. p153
- 6 Ibid. p153-154
- 7 Ibid. p154-155
- 8 S.C.Carpenter, op.cit. p211 - 250; O.Chadwick, The Victorian Church: Second Edition, London: Adam and Charles Black, 1972, Volume 2 p350-357
- 9 Principles for Churchmen p155
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- 11 Ibid. p155-156
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- 13 Ibid. p156-157
- 14 Knots Untied p206-218
- 15 Principles for Churchmen p157
- 16 Knots Untied p285-301
- 17 Principles for Churchmen p158
- 18 M.L.Loane, op.cit. p75
- 19 Expository Thoughts Volume 1 (Part 1) p28
- 20 Charges and Addresses p94
- 21 Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century p23-24
- 22 Charges and Addresses p96
- 23 Principles for Churchmen p159
- 24 Ibid.



- 25 See Chapter 27 supra
- 26 Principles for Churchmen p301
- 27 See Principles for Churchmen p305
- 28 Light from Old Times p365

## CHAPTER 29

- 1 The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion Article XXV
- 2 See Knots Untied p8,62,146; and Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century p24
- 3 Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century p24
- 4 Knots Untied p62
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century p24
- 7 Knots Untied p1-19
- 8 Ibid.p9
- 9 Expository Thoughts Volume 1 (Part 1) p410
- 10 Charges and Addresses p223
- 11 Knots Untied p130-150
- 12 Charges and Addresses p227
- 13 Knots Untied p9

## CHAPTER 30

- 1 Knots Untied p68
- 2 Ibid. p81-82
- 3 Supra, Chapter 19
- 4 See M.L.Loane, op.cit. p41, and S.C.Carpenter, op.cit. p259
- 5 W.A.Curtis, A History of Creeds and Confessions of Faith: Edinburgh: T. & T.Clark, 1911, p302-303
- 6 Knots Untied p68
- 7 Ibid. p68-71
- 8 Ibid. p68-69
- 9 Ibid. p71
- 10 Ibid. p71-72
- 11 Ibid. p75
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid. p76
- 14 Ibid. p76-78
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- 16 Ibid. p78-79
- 17 Ibid. p81
- 18 Ibid.
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- 21 Ibid. p82-83
- 22 Ibid. p83
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- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid. p70
- 29 Ibid. p73-74
- 30 Ibid. p74
- 31 Ibid. p79
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid. p80
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 See Supra Chapter 29
- 38 Knots Untied p76
- 39 Ibid. p103-129

## CHAPTER 31

- 1 Knots Untied p130
- 2 Archdeacon Denison, a leading Anglo-Catholic, quoted by Ryle in Knots Untied p135
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.(footnote)
- 5 Ibid. p130-150
- 6 Ibid. p162-164
- 7 Principles for Churchmen p252-281
- 8 Precise references are given at such places when the references in Expository Thoughts apply.
- 9 Light from Old Times p5; p15-55 passim
- 10 Charges and Addresses p325-331
- 11 The Upper Room p426-455
- 12 Ibid. p434
- 13 Ibid. p431
- 14 Principles for Churchmen p253-254
- 15 Ibid. p254
- 16 J.N.D.Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines: Fourth Edition, London: A. & C.Black, 1968, p197-198
- 17 See Q. and A. 168
- 18 Knots Untied p132
- 19 Ibid. p139
- 20 D.A.Rausch, article The Oxford Movement in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology Edited by W.A.Elwell, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987, p811-812 1987, p811-812
- 21 The Upper Room p454
- 22 Charges and Addresses p58
- 23 Ibid. p333-334

- 24 See Note 2 supra
- 25 Knots Untied p136
- 26 Ibid. p137 27 Ibid. p137-138
- 28 “The argument for the teaching of a Real Objective Presence in this passage [in the Catechism] is largely dependent upon an exploded idea of the opinions of Overall, the author of this part of the Catechism, whose opinions, moreover, orthodox or unorthodox, could in no case bind the catechism, which was, as Wheatley says, ’’allowed by the bishops’’ at the Hampton Court Conference, including Whitgift. It was made to meet the view of the Puritans of 1604, and definitely approved by the Puritans of 1661 at the Savoy Conference.’’ C.Neil, and J.M.Willoughby, The Tutorial Prayer Book: London: Church Book Room Press Ltd., 1963, p276
- 29 Knots Untied p139
- 30 Ibid. p138-139
- 31 See C.Neil and J.M.Willoughby, op.cit. p276
- 32 Knots Untied p139
- 33 Principles for Churchmen p140
- 34 Ibid. p381
- 35 H.C.G.Moule, T.W.Drury, and R.B.Girdlestone, English Church Teaching on Faith Life and Order: London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908, p117
- 36 The Upper Room p426-455
- 37 Ibid. p436-437
- 38 Charges and Addresses p222
- 39 Ibid. p222-223

## CHAPTER 32

- 1 The True Christian p215
- 2 Practical Religion p286-287
- 3 The True Christian p195-218
- 4 Ibid. p202-203
- 5 Ibid. p203
- 6 Ibid. p203-204
- 7 Ibid. p210-213
- 8 Ibid. p205-206
- 9 Expository Thoughts Volume 3 (Part 1) p298-300
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- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 L.Berkhof, History of Christian Doctrines p268
- 16 J.D.Douglas, Article on Frederic William Farrar, in The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church: Second Edition, Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978, p369
- 17 Expository Thoughts Volume 3 (Part 1) p298
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid. p298-299
- 20 Ibid. p292-293
- 21 Ibid. Volume 4 (Part 1) p170
- 22 Ibid. p162-163
- 23 Ibid. Volume 1 (Part 1) p341
- 24 Ibid. p342
- 25 Ibid. p342-343

- 26 Ibid. p343
- 27 Practical Religion p310-324
- 28 Ibid. p311-312
- 29 Ibid. p310
- 30 Ibid. p310-311
- 31 The True Christian p273 -285
- 32 Ibid. p276-277
- 33 See I.H.Murray, The Forgotten Spurgeon: Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust,(no date available) p148
- 34 Practical Religion p313
- 35 Ibid. p313-314
- 36 Ibid. p314-315
- 37 Ibid. p315
- 38 Ibid. p321
- 39 Ibid.



## CHAPTER 33

- 1 Principles for Churchmen p107-108
- 2 See Chapter 18 supra
- 3 See Chapter 19, Section 3, supra
- 4 See Chapter 12 supra
- 5 Knots Untied p3
- 6 See Knots Untied p114
- 7 See Chapter 7 supra
- 8 See Chapter 18 supra
- 9 See Chapters 29-31 supra
- 10 See Chapter 15 supra
- 11 See Chapter 31 supra
- 12 See Chapters 5,7, and 15 supra
- 13 Chapter 18, Section 4 supra
- 14 Chapter 19, Section 3.1 supra
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 See the discussion in J.Newby, op.cit. p94ff
- 17 Chapter 13, Section 2 supra
- 18 Charges and Addresses supra
- 19 Chapter 12 Section2 supra
- 20 F.Deist, A Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms: Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik, 1986, p20
- 21 See Chapters 18 and 26 supra
- 22 Old Paths p vii - viii (Preface)
- 23 See Chapter 14 supra, and our discussion there of Ryle's view of Christ's prophetic ministry stemming from His union with the Father, rather than from the anointing of the Holy Spirit
- 24 Chapter 6 supra

- 25 J.Newby, op.cit. p56-63
- 26 Light from Old Times p ix (Preface)
- 27 Charges and Addresses p28-29
- 28 Expository Thoughts Volume 1 (Part 2) p189-191
- 29 Charges and Addresses p30-31
- 30 See Chapter 3 supra
- 31 The Upper Room p35-55
- 32 Ibid. passim
- 33 Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century p428-429
- 34 Old Paths p ix (Preface)

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