

**SEVENTEENTH CENTURY SCOTTISH PIETY:
A COMPARISON OF HENRY SCOUGAL AND WILLIAM GUTHRIE**

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Introduction

Scottish theologian James Walker, lecturing at the end of the nineteenth century, says, “I think the idea has taken possession of many in our day, that Scotch religion is a religion of speculative dogma, with little in it of the personal Christ.”¹ Here Walker identifies a persistent prejudice against the Scottish Reformation in particular if not the Protestant Reformation in general. The criticism raises two questions. First, is Scottish theology overly or uniquely doctrinaire? Second, has Scottish theology gutted the “personal Christ” from its devotional life?

Walker confronts the first question by insisting that doctrinal precepts are not merely the province of Scottish theology. He insists that all belief systems, whether religious or not, are “based upon a *Credo*.”² He points out that such aberrations as held by Unitarians, for instance, do so by evolving “proposition after proposition, overthrowing, as he thinks, all the life giving Christian beliefs.”³ He furthermore shows that the real criticism leveled against Scottish orthodoxy concerns its suspicion of the “speculative” and wariness of the “metaphysical.” However, it willingly embraces “mystery.” But, as Walker affirms, “Scottish theology is...the product in the main of an honest study of the Bible and a practical religious experience.”⁴ He lists such seminal doctrines which are “taught among us” as the atonement of Christ, justification, the new birth, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and notes that they “are not in any sense speculative human reasonings, but transcendent facts”—mysteries in the true sense which

¹ James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland, 1560-1750* (1872; repr., Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1982), 174.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁴ *Ibid.*

“take hold of the deepest convictions of the least philosophical and cultured.”⁵ In short, Walker insists, “You must have some opinion about the person of Christ, if He is to be an element in your practical life.”⁶

Regarding the second question, a certain critic cited by Walker reveals his unvarnished prejudice against Reformed orthodoxy: “Immediately upon the Reformation, the personal Christ almost disappears from the theory and sermons of the new learning; and we find in His stead a number of doctrines, theses, and speculations—the substitution, in short, of a dead system for a living King.”⁷ Furthermore, the claim is illustrated by setting in juxtaposition the two devotional classics *Imitation of Christ* by German mystic Thomas á Kempis and *Pilgrim’s Progress* by Puritan John Bunyan. The critic continues, “In the former, Christ is present throughout, conversing, teaching, warning, comforting the disciple. In the later, Christ is absent, save for a casual glimpse or so, from the beginning to the end of the Christian’s pilgrimage.” Admitting that there have been seasons of “religious declension” where truth has been embraced “without a living Christ to animate them”, Walker nevertheless insists that this is not characteristic of Scotland’s “best days.” He particularly insists that, “A living personal Christ was the very soul of the seventeenth century struggle.”⁸ Citing the words of ordinary believers, especially Scotland’s orthodox martyrs, Walker implicitly raises the question, “If Scottish Reformed orthodoxy is nothing more than ‘heartless, Christless dogma’ as it is claimed, why do those who embrace it exhibit such a lively and profound devotional faith?”

⁵ James Walker, 175.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

Walker illustrates: “When the younger of the two sufferers in the waters of Blednock⁹ exclaimed, as she cast her eyes on her martyr-sister, now in her last agonies, ‘What do I behold but Christ wrestling in one of His members?’ it was no brave metaphor she spake; it was a breaking on her view of a Stephen’s vision.”¹⁰

The purpose of this essay is to explore the piety of Scottish orthodoxy in the seventeenth-century by comparing two devotional classics. First, the formation of the Scottish devotional ethos will be described. Second, Henry Scougal’s *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* will be discussed. Third, William Guthrie’s *The Christian’s Great Interest* will be surveyed. Fourth, the two devotional works will be compared with each other. Finally, some evaluation and observations will be presented.

Formation of the Scottish Devotional Ethos

The Scottish Second Reformation was the reassertion of Presbyterianism from the Glasgow Assembly in 1638 to the Restoration in 1660. It is popularly regarded as the “Golden Age” of Scottish Reformed theology despite political turmoil and ecclesiastical division in the Protestor/Resolutioner Controversy. This was the period of the Westminster Assembly (1643-1649) as well as the emergence of such distinguished writers and theologians as Alexander Henderson, Sir Archibald Johnston, Samuel Rutherford, George Gillespie, David Dickson, and James Durham.¹¹ It was also a time of religious fervor and intense piety in Scotland. The period was preceded on the one hand by seasons of revival, and on the other hand, by crises of worship as attempts were made to force Episcopalian worship upon the Church of Scotland. In 1625 David Dickson of

⁹ Martyrs under James II (1685) Margaret Wilson and Widow M’Lauchlan were drowned in the Blednock waters by being tied to stakes and overcome by the rising tide.

¹⁰ James Walker, 178. The obvious reference is to Stephen’s “Beatific Vision” in Acts 7:54-60.

¹¹ *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, s.v. “Second Reformation.”

Irvine, author of the first sympathetic commentary on the *Westminster Confession of Faith*,¹² enjoyed a ministry “that was singularly countenanced of God.” Robert Wodrow describes, “Multitudes were convinced and converted; and few that lived in his day were more honored to be instruments of conversion than he. People under exercise and soul concern came from every place...and attended sermons...and joined with him at his communions, which were indeed times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord of these amiable institutions.”¹³ On Sunday, June 20, 1630 the Kirk of Shotts celebrated a solemn communion “at which time there was so convincing an appearance of God, and down pouring of the spirit, even in an extraordinary way...[that] near five hundred had at that time a discernible change wrought on them, of whom most proved lively Christians afterwards.”¹⁴ D. E. Meeks observes that, “Ministers [like Dickson] who were associated with these revivals...became prominent figures among the Covenanters after 1638, and they wrote influential books and tracts, which not only stimulated Presbyterian piety, but also preserved the memory of great ‘warks’ of God.” He further notes that “The signing of the National Covenant in various parts of the country and its adoption by individual Presbyterian churches often generated scenes of deep emotion and soul-searching, as signatories examined their lives in the light of their ‘covenant’ with God.”¹⁵ Scottish historian James King Hewison adds, “The almost universal subscription of the Covenant produced one of the most extraordinary revivals of religion ever known in Scotland.

¹² John Macleod, *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History Since the Reformation* (repr., Greenville: Reformed Academic Press, 1995), 84.

¹³ Robert Wodrow, “Introduction” in *Truth’s Victory Over Error: A Commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith* by David Dickson (1684; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), xvi.

¹⁴ John Gillies, *Historical Collections of Accounts of Revivals* (1754; repr., Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 198.

¹⁵ *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, s.v. “Revivals.”

Reliable contemporaries believed that a special Pentecostal grace had been given to the members of the Church for their penitence and desire of a renewal of the Spirit.”¹⁶

The real issue at hand is whether Scottish piety in the seventeenth century stands on solid ground or shifting sand. Do its doctrinal precepts support or detract from its devotional life? The formation of the seventeenth-century Scottish devotional ethos came about through a number of factors. The influence of the Protestant Reformation, the actions of Scottish Reformers, its numerous received documents or symbols, as well as the literature of the era all served to shape Scottish piety. However, Hewison claims, “Without doubt, the publications which most influenced Scotland, and formed for a time the literature occupying the minds of preachers and their hearers, apart from the Bible, spiritual ballads, and the *Godlie Psalmes*, were the *Confession of Faith* (1560) *The Book of Common Order*, with *Psalm Book*, and the two *Books of Discipline*.”¹⁷ Historian J. H. S. Burleigh in his *Church History of Scotland* would agree: “The three documents we have been considering [*Scots Confession*, *Book of Common Order*, and *Book of Discipline*] are of the greatest historical importance, setting forth as they do both positively and negatively the faith and programme (sic) of the Reformers, above all of John Knox.”¹⁸ Furthermore, Adam Philip in his published lectures on *The Devotional Literature of Scotland* insists that specifically the *First Book of Discipline*, Knox’s *Liturgy* or the *Book of Common Order*, the *Scots Confession* among other things “gave

¹⁶ James King Hewison, *The Covenanters: A History of the Church of Scotland from the Reformation to the Revolution* (Glasgow: John Smith and Son, 1908), I:282.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I:163-164.

¹⁸ J. H. S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 176.

direction to the theological thinking of the country as well as its devotional thought. The young were schooled on these lines.”¹⁹

The seminal document of seventeenth century Scottish piety was the *Scots Confession* by which a believer’s faith was shaped. It marked in effect the beginning of the Reformation in Scotland as it was produced in 1560 shortly after John Knox’s return to his homeland. Knox is thought to have been its author, although the so-called “six Johns”²⁰ are given credit for producing it for Parliament in four days. It was ratified in August 1560. The *Confession* addressed twenty-five articles²¹ of doctrine consistent with Reformed churches abroad. Hewison notes that it is “based substantially upon the Calvinistic Confessions”, emphasizes the “invincible authority” of the Scriptures, and “promulgates a liberal theology [not in the modern sense] of which the key-note is justification by faith and personal sanctification through the Holy Spirit.”²² It makes a marked distinction between Reformed and Papal ecclesiology, and is decidedly Calvinistic in its view of the Lord’s Supper over and against the memorialism of Zwingli and the transubstantiation of Rome. G. D. Henderson, in his introductory comments on the *Scots Confession* observes that, “Religious instruction in Scotland was chiefly attempted through catechizing, and before the days of the *Shorter Catechism* the Church made full use of the Catechisms of Calvin, Beza, Craig, and Welsh. But it was the

¹⁹ Adam Philip, *The Devotional Literature of Scotland* (London: James Clarke & Co., Limited, n.d.), 26.

²⁰ That is, John Knox, John Willock, John Spottiswoode, John Row, John Douglas, and John Winram.

²¹ The Scots Confession contains chapters on: God, Creation of Man, Original Sin, Revelation of the Promise, Growth of the Church, the Incarnation, the God-Man, Election, Christ’s Mortality, Resurrection, Ascension, Faith in the Holy Ghost, Good Works, Works good before God, Perfect Law and Imperfect Man, the Church, Immorality, the Church True and False, Authority of Scripture, General Councils, Sacraments, Their Right Administration, Their Application, Civil Magistrate, Bequests to Church.

²² Hewison, 37.

Confession of Faith which formed the test of Reformation orthodoxy.”²³ It was this document, according to Henderson, that “nourished” the faith of Presbyterian and Prelate alike.²⁴ He says, “The Scots Confession remained the official doctrinal statement of the Church of Scotland until superseded (though not abrogate) by the adoption of the Westminster Confession in 1647....All ministers signed this Confession.”²⁵ Significantly, Henderson observes, “There are not very many direct quotations from the [Scots] Confession in the theological literature of the period, chiefly for the excellent reason that writers usually made their references direct to Scripture.”²⁶

The Books of Discipline together served as a second influence on Scottish piety. The *First Book of Discipline* was also produced in 1560 by the same body that produced the *Confession*. According to Hewison, it was “a practical supplement to the Confession” and served as “an exhibition of the function of the church and a manual of Church policy for clergy and laity.”²⁷ Although it was never passed into law in Scotland, it did seep into the consciousness of Scottish people and thus its impact was deeply felt. S. M. Houghton says that though not officially received by Parliament, “It certainly molded the life of Scotland for centuries.”²⁸ It presented in effect a vision for the Reformed Church of Scotland. Hewison says, “The grand aim was to make it easy for all to hear the gospel, for every child was to be educated, for every clever youth to proceed to college, for the

²³ G. D. Hendeson, *Scots Confession, 1560* (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland Committee on Publications, 1937), 15.

²⁴ Henderson mentions “Archbishop Spottiswood, Bishop Forbes, and Archbishop Sharps as well as Andrew Melville, Alexander Henderson, David Dickson, and Robert Baillie.”

²⁵ Henderson, 19-20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁷ Hewison, 38.

²⁸ S. M. Houghton, “John Knox” in *Puritan Papers, 1965-1967*, ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2004), 4:72.

honest poor to find bread, and for the magistrates to repress idlers and vicious persons.”²⁹

James K. Cameron, commenting on the *First Book of Discipline*, observes how it “urges the necessity of having the Gospel freely preached throughout the realm and of having all teaching opposed to the Gospel suppressed as hostile to man’s salvation.”³⁰ Under the explanation of the first head, the Word of God is placed front and center. It states:

By preaching the Gospell we understand not onely the Scriptures of the new Testament, but also of the old, to wit, the Law, Prophets, and Histories, in which Christ Jesus is no lesse contained in figure, then we have him now expressed in veritie. And therefore with the Apostle we affirme that all Scripture inspired of God is profitable to instruct, to reprove, and to exhort. In which bookes of old and new Testaments, we affirme that all things necessary for the instruction of the Church, and to make the man of God perfect, is contained and sufficiently expressed.³¹

In many ways the *First Book of Discipline* was a provisional document from the start as the Reformed Church of Scotland was not in place yet. It was in effect a missionary document serving to set things in motion until such a time when qualified ministers were of sufficient number to form Presbyteries. Until then such temporary offices as superintendents and readers were established. Houghton underscores the significance of the *First Book of Discipline* for the future generations that followed:

It was the most remarkable document which the Reformation age produced in Britain, and was the means, under God, of constituting an entire people—I speak generally—a “school of Christ.” Scotland became, as it were, an extramural Geneva, though obviously, in the very nature of the case, there could never be on a country-wide scale an extension of the tight arrangements possible in a small city; but as far as was humanly possible, this was Knox’s ideal, and through Scotland during the ensuing centuries his work reverberates.”³²

The *Second Book of Discipline* is a testimony to the success of the *First* as the Reformed Church “had passed from the first fervent missionary phase of its existence to

²⁹ Hewison, 40-41.

³⁰ James K. Cameron, *The First Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1972), 15.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

³² Houghton, *Puritan Papers*, 4:73.

one where organization had become the primary consideration.”³³ However, historian Alexander F. Mitchell observes that, “Even in the Covenanting times it is generally the Books, not the Book of Discipline” when reference is made. He furthermore states, “I do not believe that the principles of the two Books are so widely different as they have sometimes been represented to be”³⁴ and that they “have been too much read apart, instead of being regarded as complementary each of the other.”³⁵ James Kirk notes that the *Second Book of Discipline* “is the first explicit statement of Scottish Presbyterianism.”³⁶ It was a response to the “experiment in episcopacy”³⁷ endorsed by the Convention of Leith (1572) in which episcopacy was given fresh life while royal authority was asserted over the church. Produced in 1578 after the death of John Knox, it grew out of the reforming efforts of Andrew Melville. After much resistance to the Concordant of Leith the 1576 General Assembly ordered that a new church constitution be drafted. The *Second Book of Discipline*, also known as *Heads and Conclusions of the Policy of the Church*, was presented as representing the next phase in the evolution of Presbyterian government in Scotland. It was superseded by the Westminster form of church government.³⁸ The *Second Book of Discipline* was meant as a refinement and improvement of the *First Book of Discipline*. It addressed and delineated new issues like the mutual place and function of minister and magistrate. It dropped other things like the office of reader in lieu of progress in the ministerial office. John Macleod claims that

³³ Burleigh, 199.

³⁴ Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Scottish Reformation: Its Epochs, Episodes, Leaders, and Distinctive Characteristics* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1900), 216.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

³⁶ James Kirk, *The Second Book of Discipline* (1980; repr., Edinburgh: The Covenanters Press, 2005), vii.

³⁷ *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, s.v. “Second Book of Discipline.”

³⁸ Burleigh, 198-199.

with its production “the banner of the freedom of the Church was definitely unfurled.”³⁹ Together, the *Books of Discipline* represent Presbyterianism’s foundational documents and set forth the fundamental principles that have held sway in the Presbyterian movement in the seventeenth century and beyond.

A third important influence on seventeenth century Scottish piety is the *Book of Common Order* first printed in 1556. It is also called the *Order of Geneva* or simply Knox’s *Liturgy*. Again Knox receives credit for compiling this work as he created it for use in Frankfort, Germany where he was pastor of an English speaking congregation in exile. His sources were liturgies used in several continental Reformed churches. The section on the administration of the Lord’s Supper was affirmed in Scotland in 1562. The 1564 edition, having been authorized by the General Assembly, was printed in Edinburgh with the addition of a complete metrical Psalter. It held sway in the Reformed Church of Scotland from 1564 to 1645 when it was superseded by Westminster’s *Directory of Public Worship*. Because of the Psalter’s inclusion it was also called the “Psalm-book.” The General Assembly ordered that “everie minister, exhorter, and reader sall have one of the Psalme Bookes latelie printed in Edinburgh, and use the Order contained therein.”⁴⁰

The *Book of Common Order* is a manual for worship with model prayers, orders for sacraments, marriages, burials, and so forth. It includes directions for fundamental pastoral functions. According to Mitchell, it served as a “guide and aid to ministers in conducting public worship and administering the sacraments...[and] continued to hold the place thus given to it [by the 1564 General Assembly] down to 1637, when it was

³⁹ Macleod, 43.

⁴⁰ Cited by Mitchell, *The Scottish Reformation*, 128.

superseded, in so far as the king and his council were concerned, . . . by what is known as Archbishop Laud's Liturgy."⁴¹ He furthermore insists that the General Assembly's

sanction of the *Book of Common Order*:

...did not mean to restrict its ordained ministers to the use of a certain unvarying form of words, but to provide such a Directory or model as would guide them in 'the substance and right ordering of all the parts of divine worship,' as well as guide the readers and others not fully admitted to the ministry of the Word, through whose special aid alone they were able, in a time of so great dearth of qualified ministers, to supply in part the spiritual destitution of their countrymen.⁴²

It was unlike the liturgy of the Church of England which Knox regarded as a "mingle-mangle", containing certain "diabolicall inventiouns."⁴³ It offered only patterns and guidelines rather than a scripted approach to worship and prayer. Hewison insists, "The intention of the manual was conformity of practice, but not literal conformity."⁴⁴ Bard Thompson says in his *Liturgies of the Western Church*, "Indeed, every means was taken to make worship a corporate action, in which the New Testament Gospel could be expressed with clarity and simplicity."⁴⁵ Philips recognizes the indelible mark that such a pattern of worship leaves upon the heart and mind of a worshiper over time. He says:

It is of some interest in connection with the awakening of the devotional to recall the order of the service recommended, and to remember the principles underlying the Scottish Psalter. Doubtless there were practical reasons of importance which helped to determine the order of service. All the same, nothing is made plainer than the supremacy of the Word of God. After the invocation, both the Old and New Testaments were read at the beginning of worship. (Cf. *Book of Common Order*, and *Westminster Directory*.) Thus the mind of Scottish worshippers was brought into contact with God, not through devotional books or the testimony of men, but through the Book of God itself, made vivid by the living voice, and interpreted by the Spirit in a community of worshippers.⁴⁶

He furthermore argues for the power of Scotland's *Lyra Sacra*—particularly its psalmody—in fixing an indelible mark upon the devotional life of the worshipper. For

⁴¹ Mitchell, 132.

⁴² Ibid., 140.

⁴³ Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 289.

⁴⁴ Hewison, 44.

⁴⁵ Thompson, 290.

⁴⁶ Philips, 26-27.

Philips, Psalmody is a kind of liturgy unto itself. Agreeably he quotes Isaac Taylor, “The Hymn Book which they use, especially if psalmody be a favoured part of worship, rules as well the preacher as the people, to a greater extent than is often thought of, or than would perhaps be acknowledged.” He himself observes, “Where the Psalms have ever held a predominating place...[they] have become a part of the Scottish inheritance...[and] have enriched the national piety, with the best of every age and every land.”⁴⁷

If these documents gave shape to the seventeenth century Scottish devotional ethos, the devotional literature of the time breathed life into it. Hewison points out that, “Literature is the cream of a nation’s intellectual life: books are the products of brains fertilized by potent ideas, which are assured of immortality by an inherent law demanding their reproduction.”⁴⁸ When Philips maps out the territory of Scotland’s devotional literature he means that which “was intended to awaken or to express, or to sustain the devotional life.”⁴⁹ In his survey he explores the Scottish devotional legacy under the following headings: *books of the heart*, or autobiography and memoirs; *books of the spirit*, or those by men with a devotional reputation; *books of letters and thoughts*, of which Samuel Rutherford’s *Letters* are treated under a separate heading, *the golden book of love*; and, Scotland’s *Lyra Sacra*, or its Psalmody and hymnody. However, before all others and under the heading, *books of the soul*, he singles out two in particular: *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* by Henry Scougal and *The Christian’s Great Interest* by William Guthrie. These two will command that rest of this essay.

⁴⁷ Philips, 98-99.

⁴⁸ Hewison, I:154.

⁴⁹ Philips, 10.

The Life of God in the Soul of Man

Henry Scougal⁵⁰ was born in 1650 at Leuchars, Fife to Patrick Scougal, a respected Episcopalian minister who became bishop of Aberdeen in 1664. The following year at age fifteen, Henry began his studies at King's College in Aberdeen, graduating in 1668. A year later he was appointed tutor at King's College and was regarded as the first to teach Baconian philosophy in Scotland. Henry was ordained in 1672 and became parish minister of the church in Auchterless, Aberdeenshire. In 1674 he returned to Aberdeen as professor of divinity, where he taught until his early death from tuberculosis on June 13, 1678 at age twenty-eight.

Throughout his life Scougal promoted, according to Puritan authority Randall J. Peterson, a "relentless heart-religion."⁵¹ He is often identified with Robert Leighton (1611-1684) whose school of thought espoused personal holiness and theological learning. Scougal's written works are minimal. A collection of thoughts produced during his student days in 1668 were published in 1740 under the title, *Private Reflections and Occasional Meditations and Essays, Moral and Divine*. Added to those is an assortment of sermons preserved as *Nine Discourses on Important Subjects of Religion*. However, the work for which he is remembered is his influential *Life of God in the Soul of Man*; a work often compared with Thomas á Kempis' (1379-1471) devotional classic, *The Imitation of Christ*. The work itself originated as a letter to an anonymous friend explaining the Christian faith. At the encouraged of another friend it

⁵⁰ For several overviews of Henry Scougal's life see Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Peterson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 733-738; Randall J. Peterson, "The Life and Writings of Henry Scougal" in *The Works of Henry Scougal, 1650-1678* (1765; repr., Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002), ix-xxv; *The Dictionary of Scottish History and Theology*, s.v. "Scougal, Henry."

⁵¹ See Henry Scougal, *The Works of Henry Scougal*, xi.

was published in 1677 as *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. It has remained in print up to the present. The *Life of God* is divided into three parts each ending with a prayer.

In Part One, Scougal presents his view of the nature of true religion. He laments that many view religion as nothing more than “orthodox notions and opinions,” “external duties,” or “ecstatic devotion.”⁵² He rather regards true religion as “a union of the soul with God, a real participation in the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul.”⁵³ In short, he says, it is “Christ formed in you.” He calls it “a divine life.” As a *life* it proceeds “from a permanent and lively principle” which is “inward, free, and self-moving.”⁵⁴ A pious person is not driven by external threats and constraints, but “by a new nature instructing and prompting him” in his devotion to God. Scougal insists that, “He who is utterly destitute of this inward principle...can no more be accounted a religious person than a puppet can be called a man.”⁵⁵ As a *divine* life it finds its “fountain and origin” in God as its author, working “in the souls of men by the power of His Holy Spirit.” He says that religion is “a resemblance of the divine perfections, the image of the Almighty shining in the soul of man.”⁵⁶ It is distinguished from *natural* or *animal life* which Scougal reckons as “sense” and “opposed to faith.” He insists, “The difference between a religious and a wicked man is that in the one divine life bears sway, and in the other the animal life prevails.”⁵⁷

For Scougal, “The root of the divine life is faith: the chief branches are love to God, charity to man, purity, and humility.”⁵⁸ These four categories become for Scougal

⁵² Scougal, *Works*, 2.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

the grid through which he presses the remainder of his thoughts on true religion. Love to God “is a delightful and affectionate sense of the divine perfections, which makes the soul resign and sacrifice itself wholly unto Him, desiring above all things to please Him.”⁵⁹ Charity to men concerns “all the parts of justice” and “all the duties we owe to our neighbor.”⁶⁰ Purity is “a due abstractness from the body, and mastery over the inferior appetites.”⁶¹ Humility is that “deep sense of our own weakness, with a hearty and affectionate acknowledgement of our owing all that we are to the divine bounty.”⁶² Scougal admits that words are ultimately insufficient to describe the true nature of this divine life. In the remainder of part one Scougal presents Jesus as the exemplar of this divine life. He claims:

The power and life of religion may be better expressed in actions than in words, because actions are more lively things, and better represent the inward principle from whence they proceed. And therefore we may take the best measure of these gracious endowments from the deportment of those in whom they reside, especially as they are perfectly exemplified in the holy life of our blessed Savior—a main part of whose business in this world was to teach by His practice what He required of others, and to make His own conversation an exact resemblance of those unparalleled rules which He prescribed.⁶³

His concluding prayer in Part One summarizes his view of the divine life. He blesses God for sending Jesus “to instruct them by His example as well as His laws, giving them a perfect pattern of what they ought to be.”⁶⁴

In Parts Two and Three Scougal rehearses once again the “chief branches” of the divine life, first as to their “excellency and advantages,” and then as to their “difficulties and duties.” In Part Two he insists, “The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love. He who loves mean and sordid things thereby

⁵⁹ Scougal, *Works*, 12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

becomes base and vile; but a noble and well-placed affection advances and improves the spirit into a conformity with the perfections which it loves.”⁶⁵ Next, an individual so affected by the love of God enjoys “a heart enlarged to embrace the whole world.”⁶⁶ Third, as far as purity is concerned, Scougal observes, “There is no slavery so base as that whereby a man becomes a drudge to his own lusts, nor any victory so glorious as that which is obtained over them.”⁶⁷ Finally, he says regarding humility that “the soul of man is not capable of a higher and more noble endowment.”⁶⁸

Part Three, by far the longest, begins with the soliloquy of a despondent Christian who falls short of the divine life and despairs that he is “like a man in shipwreck, who discerns the land, and envies the happiness of those who are there, but thinks it impossible for he himself to get ashore.”⁶⁹ But such fears are unfounded, according to Scougal, for the “Captain of our salvation” is fighting for those who are “under His banner.” Furthermore the Holy Spirit who “awakens” the souls of men is also ready to assist his “weak and languishing creatures.” The holy war against the “usurpers” and “intruders” of sin is fought with the sense of a certain victory. The truth of the matter is this: “Religion in the souls of men is the immediate work of God; and all natural endeavors can neither produce it alone, nor merit those supernatural aids by which it must be wrought. The Holy Ghost must come upon us, and the power of the Highest must overshadow us, before that holy thing can be begotten and Christ formed in us.”⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Scougal, *Works*, 23.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

Although this work of God in granting divine life to the soul is powerful and effective, it is not divorced from “means” through which individual believers may “receive the seeds of grace and the dew of heaven.”⁷¹ Scougal proposes a set of directions for Christians to follow. The first concerns the doctrine of mortification. He says, “If we desire . . . to become partakers of the divine nature and have Christ formed in our hearts, we must seriously resolve and carefully endeavor to avoid and abandon all vicious and sinful practices.”⁷² Believers must consciously resist the encroachment of sin, engage in frequent watchfulness and self-examination, moderate lawful appetites, and “wean . . . affections from created things.” He observes, “The love of the world and the love of God are like the scales of a balance: as one falls, the other rises.”⁷³

Next, Scougal addresses Christian meditation or “consideration” of religious truths. He says, “Let us often withdraw our thoughts from this earth . . . and raise them towards that more vast and glorious world”⁷⁴ above. Meditation on Christ, his incarnation and ministry, is most profitable in this regard. “Some particular subjects of meditation” for the furthering the “various branches” of true religion are as follows: for divine love he says, “Let us consider the excellency of His nature, and His love and kindness towards us;”⁷⁵ in begetting charity to men he calls believers to remember the image of God impressed upon all human beings; in begetting purity he suggests reflection on the joys of heaven as those with such a hope purify themselves (1 John 3:3); to foster humility believers should be mindful of their own sinful failures. Yet he recognizes that the “most pure humility does not so much arise from the consideration of our own faults

⁷¹ Scougal, *Works*, 45.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 46.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

and defects as from a calm and quiet contemplation of the divine purity and goodness.”⁷⁶ Finally, Scougal offers the means of grace. He says regarding prayer that “we make the nearest approaches to God, and lie open to the influence of heaven.”⁷⁷ With regard to the Lord’s Supper Scougal insists, “We make the most severe survey of our actions, and lay the strictest obligations on our selves....All the subjects of contemplation there present themselves unto us with the greatest advantage.”⁷⁸

Scougal’s treatment of the gospel in his relatively short work is unfortunately minimalistic at best. The nine times or so that the gospel is mentioned, it is treated as ancillary rather than integral to his presentation of the divine life. When he treats faith for instance, he says,

Faith has the same place in the divine life that sense has in the natural life, being indeed nothing else but a kind of sense or feeling persuasion of spiritual things. It extends itself unto all divine truths; but, in our lapsed estate, it has a peculiar relation to the declarations of God’s mercy and reconcilableness to sinners through a Mediator. And therefore, it is ordinarily termed “faith in Jesus Christ.”⁷⁹

He speaks of those who mistakenly believe that Christ is a “Great Benefactor,” yet they remain strangers to him.⁸⁰ He mentions that “our blessed Savior” perfectly exemplifies the divine life but insists the “main part” of his business is “to teach” and model “His own conversation as an exact resemblance of those unparalleled rules which He prescribed.”⁸¹ He affirms that the “Captain of our salvation” in his incarnation descended “so that He might recover and propagate the divine life and restore the image of God in their souls”, and further mentions that he labored, toiled, bled and died, making salvation

⁷⁶ Scougal, *Works*, 72.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

effectual for thousands as “our High Priest.”⁸² He speaks of the benefits of meditating on Christ’s humiliation, considering “how the blessed Son of God came down...to live among us and die for us so that he might bring us to a portion of the same felicity.”⁸³ He further urges contemplation on Christ as the “visible representation” of God’s glory (Heb. 1:3), “who appeared in the world to reveal at the same time what God is and what we ought to be.”⁸⁴ He acknowledges that God “did not account the blood of His Son too great a price to pay” for the redemption of the lost.⁸⁵ He concludes his final prayer invoking “the merits and intercession of Thy blessed Son, and Savior.”⁸⁶ In his most explicit statement on the gospel Scougal notes, “The eternal Son of God clothed Himself with the infirmities of our flesh...so that He might dwell among men and wrestle with the obstinacy of that rebellious race, to reduce them to their allegiance and fidelity, and then to offer Himself up as a sacrifice and propitiation for them.”⁸⁷ However, these things are left unexplained and undeveloped. These are the only times Scougal mentions Christ’s objective work. They are not woven into the fabric of his book. Rather they are set on the sidelines.

The influence of *The Life of God* must not be underestimated. Although the work may not be as familiar to the modern devotional enthusiast, nevertheless such notable religious figures as John Newton, Thomas Chalmers, John and Charles Wesley, and George Whitefield all testify to its powerful influence in their lives.⁸⁸ Whitefield, the great eighteenth-century revivalist for instance, regarded Scougal’s *Life of God* as the

⁸² Scougal, *Works*, 42.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁸⁸ C. R. Walker, review of *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, by Henry Scougal, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 15, no. 2 (1962): 219-220; c.f. Peterson, “Life and Writings,” xxiv-xxv; Philips, 49-52.

catalyst which brought him to true regenerative faith. As a member of Oxford's so-called "Holy Club," an austere group of students seeking holiness through a regulated life, Whitefield knew only spiritual frustration. However, his biographer Arnold Dallimore recounts his awakening: "The immediate human cause was a book, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, written in the previous century by a young Scotsman, Henry Scougal."⁸⁹

Whitefield testifies concerning that moment:

God showed me that I must be born again, or be damned! I learned that a man may go to church, say his prayers, receive the sacrament, and yet not be a Christian. How did my heart rise and shudder, like a poor man that is afraid to look into his account-books, lest he should find himself a bankrupt.

'Shall I burn this book? Shall I throw it down? Or shall I search it?' I did search it; and, holding the book in my hand, thus addressed the God of heaven and earth: 'Lord, if I am not a Christian, or if I am not a real one, for Jesus Christ's sake, show me what Christianity is that I may not be damned at last!'

God soon showed me, for in reading a few lines further, that, 'true religion is a union of the soul with God, and Christ formed within us', from that moment, but not till then, did I know that I must become a new creature.⁹⁰

Nevertheless *Life of God* is not without its critics. David C. Lachman, authority in Scottish church history and literature, is reticent regarding approval when he notes, "It essentially presents Jesus Christ as our divine example the way that many late seventeenth-century Anglicans did."⁹¹ He compares it with Jeremy Taylor's (1613-1667) *The Divine Exemplar* (1649) which treats Christ as an example to follow. For Lachman, Scougal is "very short on Jesus' work and very long on his life." He observes that "the Anglicanism of which he was a part wound up with just a preaching of duty in a cold and formal way....He has very few references to Scripture in the book [making use of categories and distinctions without biblical basis]....He doesn't seem even to have a

⁸⁹ Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (Westchester: Cornerstone Books, 1970), I:72.

⁹⁰ Cited in Dallimore, I:73.

⁹¹ David C. Lachman, "Scottish Presbyterianism: Justification, Devotional Writings, and Marrow Controversy" (Lecture, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI, January 23, 2009).

concept of saving faith that is distinct from just sort of faith in general.” Lachman

further explains his reservations:

There is very little in Scougal to indicate that he is writing this after the Reformation. It’s sort of along the lines of Thomas á Kempis’, *Imitation of Christ*, but a late seventeenth-century version of it. Essentially Christ is our example even in his death. He mentions propitiation. He mentions Christ as a priest, but still only as basically an example to follow to enter into the divine life. It very much fits in with the rest of the basic track of late seventeenth-century Anglican thought, which is a long way from what it was in the beginning of the century. And it is still a bit vital in terms of their producing thoughts and ideas, as opposed to the early eighteenth-century version of it which was really epitomized by following the rules in a cold manner.⁹²

For Lachman, Whitefield and the Wesleys initially and understandably were attracted to Scougal because it took them beyond the intense legalism in which they were mired—which was so prevalent in the early decades of the eighteenth-century. But their real impact came later when they moved away from such models of piety and became more doctrinally grounded.

Scougal’s comparison with á Kempis is perhaps telling. Thomas á Kempis (1379-1471) was a fifteenth-century German priest and mystic belonging to the Brethren of Common Life, an association of priests organized in the Netherlands. He is credited with *The Imitation of Christ* which is indeed a devotional classic. Scougal’s association with á Kempis has been observed by many. One writer says, “Scougal might be called a mystic in the sense that Thomas á Kempis was a mystic” and observes how he develops his chief branches of the divine live “with a fervour and an eloquence that at times recalls the ‘Imitation’ .”⁹³ Michael S. Horton, scholar, pastor, and editor-in-chief of *Modern Reformation* magazine, speaks of the “valuable insights” and “profound wisdom” of the *Imitation*, but with this caveat: “[after rereading], I was reminded of what is missing from

⁹² Lachman, *Lecture*.

⁹³ C. R. Walker, 219.

this celebrated classic: most glaringly, *Christ in his saving office*.”⁹⁴ Adam Philips also notes the “wide vogue” of the *Imitation* historically among his Scottish brethren. Yet he recognizes that its ready acceptance early on was not merely due to “its gems of expression, and to its spirit of detachment and intensity,” but to two other things: 1) “it has...a side which appeals to those who would fain [willingly] assist by their doing,”⁹⁵ and 2) “Á Kempis came to a constituency that had not the Scriptures in its hand.”⁹⁶ He says that the *Imitation* came to the Scottish people “with an extraordinary freshness, and carried with it something of the power and appeal of Scripture.” And he notes, “It is still read by many who...scarcely open the Bible.” However, Philips continues, “The leaders of Scotland took men straight to the Scriptures. They looked on the Bible as the fountain-head of all true devotion.”⁹⁷ Furthermore, he tells of Robert Leighton’s attempt to persuade David Dickson as a professor of theology to teach and commend Á Kempis to his students. Philips claims, “Dickson declined on account of its Popish doctrines, and because ‘neither Christ’s satisfaction nor the doctrines of grace, but self and merite ran through it.’”⁹⁸ Á Kempis says in the *Imitation*’s first chapter, “Indeed it is not learning that makes a man holy and just, but a virtuous life makes him pleasing to God. I would rather feel contrition than know how to define it.”⁹⁹ This same sentiment is echoed a century later in Scougal’s *Life of God*:

The power and life of religion may be better expressed in actions than in words, because actions are more lively things, and better represent the inward principle from whence they proceed. And therefore we may take the best measure of those gracious endowments from the deportment of those in whom they reside, especially as they are perfectly exemplified in the holy life of our blessed Savior—a main part of whose business in this

⁹⁴ Michael S. Horton, “A Rich Tradition,” *Modern Reformation* 18, no. 2 (March/April 2009):48.

⁹⁵ Philips, 27.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹⁹ Thomas Á Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (repr., Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1962), 2.

world was to teach by His practice what He required of others, and to make His own conversation an exact resemblance of those unparalleled rules which He prescribed.¹⁰⁰

The Reformation considered justice and holiness under the rubrics of justification and sanctification. The way they articulated the relationship between them is one of the Reformed faith's great advancements in theology. The *Westminster Larger Catechism* states it this way:

Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification his Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth to the exercise thereof; in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other, it is subdued: the one doth equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection.¹⁰¹

Devotional works that either confuse justification and sanctification, collapsing one upon the other, or separate them one from the other, lack clarity at best or promote error at worst. The Westminster Divines were careful to guard against these extremes distinguishing justification and sanctification, but never separating them—they “be inseparably joined...yet they differ.” One would not expect a Kempis to write with this clarity in mind as the *Imitation* was published the century before the Reformation broke. However, Scougal should be held to a higher standard. He wrote in the milieu influenced by the Reformation as articulated by the *Scots Confession*, the *Books of Discipline*, and the *Book of Common Order*, all of which were superseded by the *Westminster Standards* before he was born. He lived in a fruitful period of Reformed fervor. That he is often recognized as a Calvinist¹⁰² is not the issue. How he treats the gospel with respect to the Christian life is. Furthermore, Scougal would not have been without contemporary

¹⁰⁰ Scougal, *Works*, 14.

¹⁰¹ *Westminster Larger Catechism* question no. 77.

¹⁰² Randall J. Peterson says, “As for the fundamental structure of his thought, he was a careful Calvinist. And though Scougal was an Episcopalian in a Presbyterian land, the Scottish church has claimed him as one of its most radiant lights.” “Life and Writings,” in Scougal, *Works*, xiii.

devotional models from which to take counsel. One such work written nearly twenty years previous to his own is William Guthrie's *The Christian's Great Interest*.

The Christian's Great Interest

William Guthrie¹⁰³ is included among the "Second Reformation Galaxy" in John MacLeod's respected *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History*. MacLeod says, "There are great times in which a crop of great men is raised up."¹⁰⁴ William Guthrie was the first of five sons born to James Guthrie, Laird of Pitforth, Angus in 1620. He studied at the University of St. Andrews under his cousin James Guthrie, who was later martyred for his role as a leading Protestor by King Charles II after the Restoration. Guthrie received his Master of Arts degree in 1638 and then studied theology under his spiritual father and mentor, Samuel Rutherford. After licensure in 1642, he served as tutor to the Lord Mauchline, son of a leading Covenanter. Having surrendered his estate rights to a younger brother in order to become a pastor, he was ordained in 1644 as minister of Fenwick, Kilmarnock where he served faithfully for twenty years. During this time he married Agnes Campbell, served as a chaplain, sided with the Protesters after the Engagement¹⁰⁵ of 1647, was moderator of the 1654 Protester Synod, and enjoyed significant spiritual blessing to his pastoral labors. After the Restoration in 1660 Guthrie continued to minister at Fenwick until 1664 when he fell into disfavor with the newly

¹⁰³ See Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Peterson, *Meet the Puritans*, 709-713; Thomas Chalmers, "Introductory Essay" in *The Christian's Great Interest: In Two Parts* by William Guthrie (Glasgow: William and Whyte & Co., 1828), v-xx; William Guthrie, "Memoirs" in *The Christian's Great Interest* (Glasgow: William and White & Co., 1828), 23-56; *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, s.v. "Guthrie, William."

¹⁰⁴ MacLeod, 66, cf. 91-92.

¹⁰⁵ The Engagement of 1647 was a treaty between Charles I and some Scottish nobles where the King promised limited support of the Covenants and Presbyterianism. Among those who "protested" the King's insincerity were James Guthrie, Samuel Rutherford, John Livingstone, and William Guthrie.

empowered Prelacy and was removed from office. He died on October 10, 1665 from kidney disease.

Like Scougal, Guthrie's written works are limited. In 1657 some unedited sermons notes on Isaiah 55 were printed by well meaning enthusiasts without his approval under the title *A Clear, Attractive, Warning Beam of Light*. Guthrie responded the following year by producing the work by which he has become known, *The Christian's Great Interest*. MacLeod claims that "no work of divinity in Scotland has had a wider circulation or has exercised a better influence than his one" except Thomas Boston's *Fourfold State*.¹⁰⁶ He calls it, "One of the best-balanced, sober, and considerate of all the treasure of practical divinity that we inherit from the 17th century."¹⁰⁷ John Owen regarded Guthrie as "'one of the greatest divines that ever wrote' and his book as containing 'more divinity' than all his folios."¹⁰⁸ Besides *The Christian's Great Interest*, a collection of seventeen sermons by Guthrie was printed in 1779 and again in 1880 as *Sermons Delivered in Times of Persecution in Scotland*.

The Christian's Great Interest is divided into two parts. Part One concerns the trial or test of a saving interest in Christ and explores the ground upon which a believer's assurance rests. Part Two addresses how to attain a saving interest in Christ if it is discovered that the "marks" of such an interest are absent. His plan is mapped out in this opening statement:

I shall speak a little respecting two things of the greatest concern. The one is, How a person may know if he hath a true and special interest in Christ, and whether he doth lay just claim to God's favour and salvation. The other is, In case a person fall short of

¹⁰⁶ MacLeod, 91.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 91.

¹⁰⁸ *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, s.v. "Guthrie, William."

assurance in this trial, what course he should take for making sure of God's friendship and salvation to himself.¹⁰⁹

Guthrie begins by setting forth a number of working premises. He notes that “a man's interest in Christ, or his gracious state, may be known.”¹¹⁰ He furthermore places this saving interest in the context of the covenant of grace and insists that the Scriptures speak as the “uncontroverted rule” regarding this gracious state. Guthrie also premises that genuine believers may lack assurance of their saving interest for a number of reasons. He explores such root causes as ignorance of God, deceitfulness of conscience, spiritual laziness, and so forth. He admonishes, “Be ashamed, you who spend so much time in reading romances, in adorning your persons, in hawking and hunting, in consulting the law concerning your outward state in the world, and it may be in worse things than these; Be ashamed, you that spend so little time in the search of this, whether ye be an heir of glory or not?”¹¹¹

The crux of Part One concerns two “principle marks” by which “a man may know if he be savingly in covenant with God and hath a special interest in Christ.”¹¹² However, before these come into play Guthrie explains the preparatory work of the Law, or “the Work of Humiliation” as he calls it. He recognizes that there are extraordinary occasions when a person may be called from the womb such as John the Baptist or Timothy, or brought to Christ in a “sovereign gospel-way” like Zaccheus who came to faith with minimal preaching. Again, some are effectually called “at the hour of death” like the thief on the cross. Nevertheless, the ordinary way people are brought to Christ “is by a

¹⁰⁹ William Guthrie, *The Christian's Great Interest* (1658; repr., Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), 22.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹¹¹ Guthrie, 32.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 37.

clear and discernable work of the law.” Guthrie says, “There is a conviction of sin, an awakening of conscience, and a work of humiliation” which generally precedes “a gracious work of God’s Spirit.” He recognizes that this work is sometimes “more violent and sudden” and other times “more quiet and gradual, so as to be protracted through greater length of time, by which means the steps of it are very discernable.”¹¹³ He denies a prototypical conversion experience but affirms that where the Lord “so convinceth of sin, corruption, and self-emptiness, and makes a man take salvation to heart as the one thing necessary, and set him to work in the use of the means which God hath appointed for relief, . . . such a work rarely shall be found to fail of a good issue and gracious result.”¹¹⁴

The first mark of a gracious state is faith in Christ—a “closing with Christ in the gospel”—which Guthrie recognizes as “the condition of the covenant.”¹¹⁵ He says that “the Scriptures hath clearly resolved justifying faith into a *receiving* of Christ.”¹¹⁶ Such faith for Guthrie is denominated as “*looking* to him,”¹¹⁷ “*leaning on the Lord*,”¹¹⁸ and an “act of waiting.”¹¹⁹ Faith is “the instrument” of all spiritual blessing which includes “union and communion” with Christ.¹²⁰ Justifying faith, he says, is “believing on Christ and on His name, the receiving of Him, and resting on Him for salvation.”¹²¹ It is distinguished from the faith of hypocrites in that “a man closeth wholly with Christ in all

¹¹³ Guthrie, 43.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

His offices, judging all His will ‘good, holy, just, and spiritual’¹²² and that “true faith is never alone in a man, but attended with other saving graces.”¹²³

The second mark of a saving interest in Christ is that of the new creature. Guthrie says, “It is not simply a new tongue or new hand, but a *new man*.”¹²⁴ The whole person accordingly is renovated to some extent. For example, he is renewed in his understanding, affections, and even his physical members such that Christ appears supremely desirable to him. Furthermore, a person is renovated in all his ways to some extent. It affects his interests, his worship, his vocational calling, his relationships, and his Christian liberty. Guthrie says, “He studies to make use of meat, drink, sleep, recreations, apparel, with an eye to God, labouring not to come under the power of any lawful thing.”¹²⁵ Furthermore, he insists, “This renovation of a man in all manner of conversation, and this being under the law to God in all things,” is the essence of truth gospel holiness.¹²⁶ Hypocrites, on the other hand, never experience this change of heart and consequent change of life. Guthrie says, they “never apprehended Christ as the only satisfying good in all the world, for which with joy they would quit all.”¹²⁷ Accordingly, they lack the “three great essentials of true Christianity”: a broken heart, an ownership of Christ as the supreme treasure, and an earnest closure with him.¹²⁸

Having established the genuine marks of saving grace, Guthrie turns to the question, “What shall they do who want [or lack] the marks of a true and saving interest

¹²² Guthrie, 74.

¹²³ Ibid., 75.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 76.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 82.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 83.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 91.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 93.

in Christ.”¹²⁹ He premises his response on the conviction that God is in need of reconciliation and he works to this end through the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. He recognizes that the spiritual promises of the covenant are secured through Christ. Those who profess their “satisfaction with Christ...whilst their heart is not engaged...[yet] He doth admit them to be members of His church, granting unto them the use of ordinances, and many other external mercies and privileges.”¹³⁰ Thus the church is mixed with both believers and hypocrites. Only the elect truly close with Christ.

The heart of Part Two explores what it means to come to God through Christ in a saving way. Guthrie explains:

To close with God’s plan of saving sinners by Christ Jesus, is to quit and renounce all thoughts of help or salvation by our own righteousness, and to agree unto this way which God hath found out: it is to value and highly esteem Christ Jesus as the treasure sufficient to enrich poor sinners; and with the heart to believe this record, that there is life enough in Him for men: it is to approve this plan and acquiesce in it, as the only way to true happiness: it is to point towards this Mediator, as God holdeth Him out in the gospel, with a desire to lay the stress of our whole state on Him.¹³¹

This duty of closing with Christ—or receiving him by faith—is incumbent upon all people for, Guthrie says, it is “commanded everywhere in Scripture by the Lord as the condition of the new covenant.”¹³² He urges that “everyone who is come to years of understanding, and heareth this gospel, is obliged to take to heart his own lost condition, and God’s gracious offer of peace and salvation through Christ Jesus, and speedily to flee from the wrath to come, by accepting and closing with this offer.”¹³³ Guthrie stresses that an individual must acknowledge he is sinful and lost, under God’s wrath, impotent to procure peace, and “void of all the saving graces.” Guthrie insists, “He must be affected

¹²⁹ Guthrie, 116.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 124.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 126.

with these things.”¹³⁴ Furthermore such concern produces contrition and leads to “a taking of salvation to heart more than anything else.”¹³⁵ He who truly closes with Christ apprehends “distinctly, that God hath devised a way to save poor lost man by Jesus Christ, whose perfect righteousness hath satisfied offended justice, and procured pardon and everlasting favor.”¹³⁶ He recognizes that God “is willing to be reconciled unto men through Christ, and has obligated men to close with Him through Christ Jesus, and so to appropriate that salvation to themselves.”¹³⁷ Such a man, according to Guthrie, “Must resolve to break all covenants with hell and death.”¹³⁸

Guthrie also insists, “Believing on Christ must be personal.”¹³⁹ It is not sufficient for one to place confidence in baptism or the faith of parents. He claims, “Unless a man in his own person have faith in Christ Jesus, and with his own heart approve, and acquiesce in that device of saving sinners, he cannot be saved.”¹⁴⁰ He notes that though this faith is a gift, it nevertheless remains personal. For Guthrie, the outcome of such saving faith is union and communion with God. He says there is “a strange oneness between God and the man”¹⁴¹ resulting in an “intimacy and familiarity between”¹⁴² them.

Comparison of Scougal and Guthrie

Although Scougal and Guthrie were both ministers in Scotland in the mid-seventeenth-century, and both wrote in a similar confessional milieu, one was Anglican and the other Presbyterian. Allen regards each of their works as “classics” of Scottish

¹³⁴ Guthrie, 130.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 132.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 132.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 133.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 134.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 135.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 140.

¹⁴² Ibid., 142.

devotional literature. On the genre of devotional literature in general he recognizes that “some deal with more fundamental things than others.” He observes, “One may appeal to the head, another to the heart, another to the conscience....One may be didactic, meditative; in another aspiring or again detached. One may be intensely analytic, another quite the reverse.”¹⁴³ *The Life of God* and the *Christian’s Great Interest* are indeed different, but they do cover similar territory. They are both concerned with what constitutes a genuine regenerative faith, and how the gospel relates to the Christian life. In this respect, Guthrie has to be judged more successful.

Scougal’s analysis of true religion is accomplished at the expense of the objective work of Christ. Consequently, Christ as the divine exemplar of the Christian life dominates his work. Scougal claims, “The power and life of religion may be better expressed in actions than in words...especially as they are perfectly exemplified in the holy life of our blessed Savior—a main part of whose business in this world was to teach by His practice what he required of others.”¹⁴⁴ He prays, “Blessed be Thine infinite mercy, who sent Thine own Son to dwell among men, and to instruct them by His example as well as His laws giving them a perfect pattern of what they ought to be.”¹⁴⁵ True as this may be, when the gospel is recessed into the background, pressing forward in the Christian life becomes a human endeavor. The persistent comparison of Scougal with á Kempis is noteworthy. As a medieval mystic, á Kempis routinely stresses human merit as the ground of spiritual blessing in his *Imitation*. For example he says, “Make friends for yourself now by honoring the saints of God, *by imitating their actions (emphasis mine)*, so that when you depart this life they may receive you into everlasting

¹⁴³ Allen, 33.

¹⁴⁴ Scougal, *Works*, 14.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

dwellings.”¹⁴⁶ Again he says, “In this life your work is profitable, your tears acceptable, your sighs audible, your sorrow satisfying and purifying.”¹⁴⁷ Continuing, he acknowledges no hope in the finished work of Christ: “It is better to atone for sin now and to cut away vices than to keep them for purgation in the hereafter.”¹⁴⁸ His theology disallows any ground of assurance: “Continue to have reasonable hope of gaining salvation, but *do not act as though you were certain (emphasis mine)* of it lest you grow indolent and proud.”¹⁴⁹ What is more he claims, “Even though you may have walked for many years on the pathway to God, you may well be ashamed if, with the image of Christ before you, you do not try to make yourself more like him.”¹⁵⁰ Contrast this vision of the Christian life with that of the notable John Owen (1616-1683) who wrote much of sin and the need for mortification. But, what does Owen see as the hope for believers in the morass of sin? He says in his *Indwelling Sin*, “If the heart be filled with the cross of Christ, it casts death and undesirableness upon them all; it leaves no seeming beauty, no appearing pleasure or comeliness, in them....Labour, therefore,” he admonishes, “to fill your hearts with the cross of Christ.”¹⁵¹ One would have hoped that Scougal were clearer in this regard.

This is where Guthrie shines. Unlike Scougal, Guthrie’s presentation of the *Christian’s Great Interest* is filled with Scriptural references and quotations. Furthermore, he is categorically confessional. Although, making only one allusion to the “our Confession”¹⁵² his universe of thought clearly takes into account such symbols of

¹⁴⁶ Á Kempis, 42.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 43.

¹⁴⁸ Á Kempis, 43-44

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 49.

¹⁵¹ John Owen, *Works*, VII:250.

¹⁵² Guthrie, 71

his Scottish theology and Reformed heritage. For example, he affirms the need to receive Christ in his entirety: “I welcome the offer of Christ in all His offices, as a King to rule over me, a Priest to offer sacrifices and intercede for me, a Prophet to teach me; I lay out my heart for Him and towards Him, resting on Him as I am able. What else can be meant by the word RECEIVING.”¹⁵³ Justification, a doctrine absent in Scougal, is central to Guthrie. The covenant of works and the covenant of grace are the motif in which this is explained.¹⁵⁴ Faith is the instrument of justifying grace.¹⁵⁵ Salvation by the covenant of works or “inherent righteousness” is explicitly denied.¹⁵⁶ Christ’s perfect and imputed righteousness alone is the believer’s full satisfaction.¹⁵⁷ Regenerative grace accomplishes for the believer “some renovation in all the affections, as in every other part of the soul, pointing towards God.”¹⁵⁸ And, though the believer can expect difficulties to arise in living the Christian life, as is explained in Romans 7, he thanks God for victory in Jesus and the confidence that there is no condemnation for those who walk in the Spirit.¹⁵⁹ Guthrie discloses his catechetically informed mind by producing a catechism of the *Christian’s Great Interest* which concludes the work as a summary.

Evaluation and Observations

At the beginning of this essay James Walker was quoted as saying over a century ago, “I think the idea has taken possession of many in our day, that Scotch religion is a religion of speculative dogma, with little in it of the personal Christ.”¹⁶⁰ He furthermore identified the prejudice as more pervasive when he quoted a critic as saying,

¹⁵³ Guthrie, 25.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 117.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 67.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 123.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 132.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 80.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 96-97.

¹⁶⁰ James Walker, 174.

“Immediately upon the Reformation, the personal Christ almost disappears from the theory and sermons of the new learning; and we find in His stead a number of doctrines, theses, and speculations—the substitution, in short, of a dead system for a living King.”¹⁶¹ This criticism regarding the Reformed heritage persists today as Michael S. Horton observes:

There has long been a nagging suspicion among many that while the Reformation provided a needed course-correction in doctrine we need to look elsewhere for practice. If you want to learn about justification, ask a Reformed or Lutheran person. But if you want to learn about life in the Spirit, ask Pentecostals; if you want to learn about growing in grace, look to the great tradition of Catholic devotion, Protestant pietism, Wesleyan writers, and contemporary experts on spiritual disciplines.¹⁶²

Two observations must be noted in conclusion. First, the Scottish church of the seventeenth-century *has* left a rich devotional legacy. The above criticism is simply prejudicial and false. Both the *Life of God* and the *Christian’s Great Interest* are representative of the Scottish impulse for religion that is more than “speculative dogma” or a “dead system” of beliefs. Speaking of the Reformation in Scotland, Mitchell affirms its spiritual potency over and above the obvious reforms of Word and doctrine:

The Reformation movement was not only the introduction of a more scriptural and scientific method of exhibiting Christian doctrine, and simple unfolding of its teaching as to man’s fallen state and the remedy their heavenly Father had in His love provided for them; not only the reassertion of the supremacy of the Written Word of God over human traditions, as well as of the right of all Christian men and women to have direct access to that blessed Word; not only the translation into the vernacular...and the circulation throughout Western Europe of that which for ages had been to the Christian laity as a book that is sealed; but it was also, above all this, the infusion of a new and higher life into the churches. We fall short of a full comprehension of the movement if we fail to recognise (sic) that the God of all grace and blessing was then pleased to “send a plentiful rain to confirm His inheritance when it was weary,” to grant a second Pentecost to the church, to make the people willing in the day of His power, and to pour out His Spirit in rich abundance.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ James Walker, 176.

¹⁶² Horton, “A Rich Tradition,” 48.

¹⁶³ Mitchell, 4-5.

Second, the comparison of Scougal and Guthrie uncovers a theological tension that existed in seventeenth-century Scotland, and still exists today. The issue has been described by theologian George Lindbeck as the tension between the “imitation-of-Christ” and the “union-with-Christ” paradigms of spirituality.¹⁶⁴ Walker’s critic praised á Kempis’ *Imitation* but eschewed Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Yet the *Imitation* is void of the saving office of Christ; Christian, in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, begins his journey at the foot of the cross. This is the main concern. In an article entitled, *Following Christ: What’s Wrong and Right about the Imitation of Christ*, Horton says, “Apart from the imputation of righteousness, sanctification is simply another religious self-improvement program.”¹⁶⁵ Commenting on Romans 10 he insists that “the imitation paradigm easily slips into ‘the righteousness that is by works,’ offering agendas for ascending to heaven to bring God down or descend into the depths as if to bring Christ up from the dead.”¹⁶⁶ He recognizes the persistent proliferation of movements from the medieval period to the present that emphasize “works-righteousness” to varying degrees.¹⁶⁷ Within these diverse movements there are common threads running through them. He mentions the following: “Christ’s example over his unique and sufficient achievement; the inner experience and piety of believers over the external work and Word of Christ; our moral transformation over the Spirit’s application of redemption; private soul formation over the public ministry of the means of Grace.”¹⁶⁸ These criteria can be applied to the

¹⁶⁴ Cited by Michael S. Horton, “Following Christ: What’s Wrong and Right About the Imitation of Christ,” *Modern Reformation* 18, no. 2 (March/April 2009): 16, 18.

¹⁶⁵ Horton, “Following Christ,” 16. Horton’s reference to “the imitation of Christ” in the article concerns a particular paradigm of piety, not á Kempis’ classic by the same title.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶⁷ Horton mentions medieval mysticism, the Anabaptist tradition, Quakers, Pietism, and Protestant Liberalism, 17.

¹⁶⁸ Horton, “Following Christ,” 17.

seventeenth-century Scottish devotional literature. What may be regarded as an insipient difference between Scougal and Guthrie is a far wider chasm today.

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Henry Scougal was a Scottish Anglican theologian, minister and author. Scougal produced a number of works while a pastor and professor of divinity at King's College, Aberdeen. Discover new books on Goodreads. See if your friends have read any of Henry Scougal's books. Sign in with Facebook. Sign in options. Join Goodreads. Henry Scougal's Followers (3). Henry Scougal. edit data. Henry Scougal was a Scottish Anglican theologian, minister and author. Scougal produced a number of works while a pastor and professor of divinity at King's College, Aberdeen. His most recognized work, *The Life Of God In The Soul Of Man*, was originally written to a friend to explain Christianity and give spiritual counsel. Henry Scougal (1650 - 1678) was a godly young Scotch Puritan who produced a number of works in his brief life while a pastor and professor of divinity at King's College, Aberdeen. His greatest production is by consensus, *The Life Of God In The Soul Of Man*, which was originally written to a friend to explain Christianity and give spiritual counsel. This short treatise displays unusual perception and maturity for one so young. In addition to his literary productions, Henry Scougal was also noted for his piety and his clear grasp of scripture, aided in turn by his proficiency in Latin, Hebrew, Greek, and some of the cognate oriental languages. by Henry Scougal 43 editions - first published in 1677. *The life of God in the soul of man, or, The nature and excellency of the Christian religion.* by Henry Scougal 24 editions - first published in 1677. *Works Of The Rev. Henry Scougal.* by Henry Scougal 3 editions - first published in 2002. *A sermon preach'd on the 25th of December, being the nativity of our Saviour.* by Henry Scougal 3 editions - first published in 1737. *The Works Of The Rev. H. Scougal Containing The Life Of God In The Soul Of Man With Nine Other Discourses.* Piety Without Asceticism Or The Protestant Kempis. by Henry Scougal, Charles How 1 edition - first published in 2007. *Piety Without Asceticism Or The Protestant Kempis.* by Henry Scougal, Charles How 1 edition - first published in 2007. *The works of the Rev.*