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William Perkins and  
the Christian Life:  
The Place of the Moral Law and  
Sanctification in Perkins' Theology

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*Dr McKim has previously contributed to The Evangelical Quarterly in his specialist area of Puritan studies, his last essay being on 'The Puritan View of History' (Oct., 1980, 215-37). His thesis was on William Perkins, and this essay gives us a glimpse into Perkins' theological method.*

William Perkins (1558-1602), premier Puritan theologian of Elizabethan England had much to say about the moral law and sanctification. Perkins was a systematic theologian, polemicist, Biblical exegete and comforter of souls through his 'cases of conscience.' The latter were case studies of how ethical decisions are construed and pastoral care administered in the Christian life.<sup>1</sup>

The link between 'the law' and the Christian life may be made many ways theologically. In the Reformed tradition a distinctive has been John Calvin's emphasis that the law of God plays an important part as a norm and guide for the Christian. This is the so-called 'third use of the law' (*usus tertius legis*) which Calvin called the 'principal use' of the law.<sup>2</sup> While this positive use of the law is not unique to Calvin since it is found also in Melancthon<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Ian Breward, 'William Perkins and the Origins of Puritan Casuistry,' *Faith and a Good Conscience*, 1963, 5-17; 'William Perkins and the Origins of Reformed Casuistry,' *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 40, 1, 1968, 3-20 and C. C. Markham, 'William Perkins' Understanding of the Function of Conscience,' Diss. Vanderbilt University 1967. Cf. John T. McNeill, 'Casuistry in the Puritan Age,' *Religion in Life*, 12, 1943, 76-89.

<sup>2</sup> On this see I. John Hesselink, 'Christ, the Law, and the Christian An Unexplored Aspect of the Third Use of the Law in Calvin's Theology,' in *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids, 1984), 179-191 and the literature cited there.

<sup>3</sup> See Melancthon, *Loci Communes in Melancthon on Christian Doctrine*, ed. Clyde L. Manschreck, Library of Protestant Thought (New York, 1965), 122-128.

and in the Lutheran Formula of Concord,<sup>4</sup> it has been seen as a special characteristic of the piety and ethics of Reformed thought. In this sense it is clear that the law is joined with sanctification.

This link is possible in Calvin and his followers when the moral law is seen as a primary expression of the will of God. For Calvin, Christians are 'taught to live not according to their own whim but according to God's will.'<sup>5</sup> To direct one's complete activity to the will of God is the ultimate and most comprehensive norm of the Christian life. Calvin saw, however, that it was in the law that the will of God is clearly revealed. As he wrote: 'the precepts of the law . . . comprehend the will of God'<sup>6</sup> and 'God has revealed his will in the law.'<sup>7</sup> For in the law God 'lays down what he demands from us, and, in short, everything necessary to be known.'<sup>8</sup> God's moral law as expressed in the Decalogue contains 'a perfect pattern of righteousness' for it is the 'one everlasting and unchangeable rule to live by.'<sup>9</sup>

This high regard for the law and its positive use in the sanctification of the Christian is expressed also in English Puritanism. It is found in those Puritans called 'pietistic Puritans' or 'practical' theologians such as William Perkins, Richard Greenham (1535?–1594?), Richard Rogers (1550?–1618), John Dod (1549?–1645), Paul Baynes (d. 1617), and Richard Sibbes (1577–1635).<sup>10</sup> This has led Ernest Stoeffler to speak of 'the piety of the law' in these writers. For them, with Perkins as a prime example, theology and piety went hand in hand. As Stoeffler wrote:

Piety was applied theology, theology was the intellectual foundation of piety. The basic concern was piety. This is what Perkins meant when he wrote: 'Theology is the science of living blessedly forever.' Theology to him was in essence the rationale for a way of life thought to have been revealed by God and subject to his will.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia, 1959) 479ff. where section VI is entitled, 'The Third Function of the Law.'

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia, 1960), III. 8. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Institutes* I. 17. 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Institutes* II. 8. 59.

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah*. Calvin Translation Society (Grand Rapids, n.d.), 129. *Commentary on Isaiah* 8:20.

<sup>9</sup> *Institutes* II. 7. 13. Cf. *Institutes* II. 8. 5; IV. 13. 12.

<sup>10</sup> On these see such sources as William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (Philadelphia, 1972; rpt. 1938); Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London, 1971; rpt. 1967); and Ian Breward, ed., *The Work of William Perkins*, The Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics 3 (Appleford, 1970), etc.

<sup>11</sup> F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*. Studies in the History of Religion (Leiden, 1965), 56.

Stoeffler goes on to argue that the piety of sixteenth and seventeenth century puritan communities 'had its center in the majesty of the divine law.'<sup>12</sup> This took the shape of forming an 'ethical code' which 'purported to delineate through careful exposition of Scripture and logical deduction God's sovereign will for every conceivable condition of the Christian's life.'<sup>13</sup> While this concern for 'a set of rules for daily life' is not found as explicitly in Perkins as in others such as Greenham and Rogers the general thrust of what Stoeffler has indicated does stand for Perkins. As a master Protestant casuist, Perkins' 'cases of conscience' sought to make theological and ethical teachings concrete by posing questions to which answers might be given from as Perkins wrote: 'a certaine and infallible doctrine, propounded and taught in the Scriptures, whereby the conscience of men distressed, may be quieted and releued.'<sup>14</sup> As guidelines to obedience for the Christian, Perkins prescribes that the Christian's 'new obedience' to God 'must be the keeping of euery commandement of God: for as S. Iames saith, Iam, 2.10. He that breakes one commandement, is guiltie of all . . .'<sup>15</sup> In this sense, the moral law is an integral part of the sanctification process.

But to see this dynamic more fully, attention may be turned to the functions of the moral law in Perkins' thought—the relationship of law and Gospel and then to the shape of sanctification—how the Christian life is perceived in relationship to the law.

### The Functions of the Moral Law

In his work of systematic theology, *A Golden Chaine*, Perkins dealt with the law in an extended section which led to an exposition of each of the Ten Commandments (I, 32–69). As recent study has shown, William Perkins was fully committed to the philosophy and methods of Peter Ramus (1515–1572), the French logician, philosopher and educational reformer.<sup>16</sup> Ramus sought to liberate logic from the highly structured and scientific approach it took in the Middle Ages. He wished to simplify

<sup>12</sup> See Stoeffler, p. 58.

<sup>13</sup> Stoeffler, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Vniuersitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1616–1618), II, 1. Further references to Perkins' *Works* may be cited in the body of the text.

<sup>15</sup> *Works* II, 16.

<sup>16</sup> See Donald K. McKim, 'Ramusism in William Perkins,' Diss. University of Pittsburgh, 1980 to be published as *Ramusism in William Perkins' Theology* (Bern, 1987). Cf. Walter J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (New York, 1974; rpt. 1958).

Aristotelianism and make logic serve more practical purposes for education. In this, Ramus stood in the tradition of Renaissance humanism which sought to combine logic and rhetoric to give full expression to human thought. The key to this for Ramus was 'method.' Method was the orderly presentation of a subject by joining together the 'arguments' or 'concepts' that made up a topic. The logician's task was to classify these arguments and present them in such a fashion (through proper method) so as to make them intelligible and memorable. For Ramus, this method most often took the form of dichotomies where a topic was defined and divided. His movement was from the most general or universal to the specifics or particulars. This method could be graphically portrayed by charts which turned out to resemble blueprints or branching trees. All the elements of a subject were divided, then subdivided until each had its own location on the chart. This bracketed outline spread out in a geometrical pattern of bifurcation as the dichotomies unfolded. It spread horizontally across a page so that at a glance, one could locate the basic elements or propositions of a subject and see their relationship to the topic as a whole.<sup>17</sup>

Ramus' method stands behind the construction of nearly all Perkins' works and Ramism served important purposes for Perkins' thought as a whole.<sup>18</sup> Perkins' *A Golden Chaine* was constructed according to Ramist method. As such, the Ramist route to the moral law via the Ramist-chart was as follows: Theology, defined as 'the science of the living blessedly for euer' (I, 11) is divided into two parts: God and the Works of God. The works of God are divided into God's decree and the execution of the decree. The decree pertains to 'all things' and with regard to humans, to predestination. Predestination is divided into its means and parts. The parts of predestination are election and reprobation. Election has three parts: its foundation, means and degrees. The means of God's election are God's covenant and the seal of God's covenant (the sacraments). God's covenant is divided into the parts and kinds of the covenant. The kinds of the covenant are the covenant of works and grace. It is the covenant of works which Perkins defined as being made by God 'with

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<sup>17</sup> Over fifty Ramist-type charts are reproduced in McKim, 'Ramism,' Figures.

<sup>18</sup> See McKim, 'Ramism,' ch. 7. For the importance of Ramism for Perkins' exegesis of Scripture see Donald K. McKim, 'Ramism as an Exegetical Tool for English Puritanism as Used by William Perkins,' *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, 1984, pp. 11–21. For the significance of Ramism for Perkins' whole theology see Donald K. McKim, 'The Functions of Ramism in William Perkins' Theology,' *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 16, 4, 1985, 503–517.

condition of perfect obedience' that is 'expressed in the moral law' (I, 32).<sup>19</sup>

Perkins defined the moral law as 'that part of Gods word, which commandeth perfect obedience vnto man, as well as his nature, as in his actions, and forbiddeth the contrarie' (I, 32). This law is divided in Ramist fashion in Perkins' treatment into its 'parts' and 'use'. Its parts are 'the Edict, commanding obedience, and the condition binding to obedience' (I, 32). The Ten Commandments which Perkins explicates in a three-fold form for each: 'Resolution,' 'The affirmative part' and 'The negative part' are seen as 'an abridgement of the whole law, and the couenant of workes' (I, 32). The 'use of the law' which Perkins took up some 28 pages later after he exegeted the 10 Commandments is a use both for 'vnregenerate persons' and 'in such as are regenerate' (I, 69-70).

It is the use of the moral law in the unregenerate that took most of Perkins' attention here. He cited three uses: first 'to lay open sinne, and make it knowne.' The second use of the law is 'accidentarily [*sic*] to effect and augment sinne, by reason of the flesh, the which causeth man to decline from that which is commanded, and euer to incline to that which is prohibited' (I, 69). The third use in the unregenerate is 'to denounce eternal damnation for the least disobedience, without offering any hope of pardon' (I, 70). In sum, Perkins said to the unregenerate:

If therefore, thou desirest seriously eternall life: first take a narrow examination of thy selfe, and the course of thy life, by the square of God's law: then set before thine eyes the curse that is due vnto sinne, that thus bewailing thy miserie, & despairing vterly of thine owne power, to attaine euerlasting happines, thou maiest renounce thy selfe, and be prouoked to seeke and sue vnto Christ Jesus (I, 70).

In contrast, Perkins said of the use of the law for the regenerate that 'it guideth them to *new obedience* in the whole course of their life, which obedience is acceptable to God by Christ' (I, 70). It is the new obedience, as will be seen, that is the key to sanctification and the Christian life for Perkins. Perkins thus saw that the moral law of God was in and of itself an insufficient means by which the salvation of sinners could be attained. For it is through the Gospel of Jesus Christ that salvation comes.

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<sup>19</sup> For Perkins' views on the covenant see Donald K. McKim, 'William Perkins and the Theology of the Covenant,' *Studies of the Church in History Essays honoring Robert S. Paul on his Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. Horton Davies (Allison Park, Pennsylvania, 1983). For a partial Ramist-style chart of A Golden Chaine see Figure A.

Perkins noted both points of continuity and discontinuity between law and Gospel. Law and Gospel are 'two parts of God word' (I, 408). They must be taught together (III, 273). They agree or 'consent' in such things as their common author—God; their 'general matter, for both require iustice and righteousnesse to saluation' and both have a common end—"the glory of God."<sup>20</sup>

Yet they differ significantly as well. The law is 'written by nature by creation,' while the Gospel is 'above the reach of nature created'; the law would have us do something whereas the Gospel requires only believing in Christ; the law is propounded to the unbeliever to lead to faith but the Gospel is to the believer to increase faith; the law shows sin and justice without mercy while the Gospel 'couereth sinne, and is a qualification of the rigour of the law'; the law says what good works must be done but the Gospel tells how they must be done and the law is 'the ministry of death' while 'the gospel preached worketh grace only.'<sup>21</sup> Thus the contrasts are strong: the law 'shewes us our disease, and giues vs no remedie'; the 'Gospel ministreth the spirit' (II, 224). The law says 'do,' the Gospel, 'believe' (II, 236; 244); the law 'genders to bondage: the Gospel genders to life' (II, 299). The law is 'from Sina, the Gospel from Sion or Ierusalem (II, 299). The law and the Gospel are 'not one in substance of doctrine' (II, 311; 299; 212). Throughout his extended commentary on the Book of Galatians Perkins made these kinds of statements continually.

But while the moral law convicts of sin and the punishment thereof, the evangelical centre of William Perkins' writings was that the moral law served this purpose 'till Christ.' That is, as he commented on Galatians 5:19—"Wherefore then serues the Law? it was added, because of transgressions, untill the seede was come to which the promise was made," Perkins wrote that: 'The Ministerie of condemnation which was in force till Christ, at his coming is turning into the Ministerie of the spirit, and of grace' (II, 245). In Jesus Christ 'there is full redemption from the curse of the law.'<sup>22</sup>

Perkins thus contended that with the coming of Christ, specifically with the Resurrection of Christ, the moral law as

<sup>20</sup> III, 495. Cf. III, 34\* (The asterisk designates the first 264 pages of Volume III of Perkins' *Works* which is his exposition of Christ's Sermon on the Mount).

<sup>21</sup> III, 495. Cf. the similar list of five differences Perkins cites in III, 363 and III, 33.

<sup>22</sup> II, 237. Perkins also saw Christ as the one who restored the Moral Law to 'his true sense and meaning, which was much corrupted by the Iewish teachers.' He says this while commenting on Mt. 5:17 and sees Christ as 'fulfilling' the law 'by his doctrine, in his person, and in men,' III, 33\*, 34\*.

God's demands for obedience was abrogated.<sup>23</sup> It was abrogated in three ways for those of the Church, those who believe in Jesus Christ: First, in respect to justification; secondly in respect to malediction, or curse and thirdly in respect to rigor. 'For in them, that are in Christ,' wrote Perkins, 'God accepts the endeauour to obey, for obedience itselfe. Neuerthelesse, the law, as it is the rule of good life, is vnchangeable, and admits no abrogation. And Christ in this regard did by his death establish it, Rom. 3:31' (II, 251, cf. II, 212; III, 36\*). Perkins' point here was that:

The law reignes ouer all men without exception, til they be iustified. Whey they once beginne to beleeeue in Christ, & to amend their liues, then the dominion of the law ceaseth, and they then are no more vnder the law, but vnder grace (II, 213).

When the sinner is justified by God's grace through faith to Jesus Christ the power of the moral law to reveal sin and condemn is at an end. The believer is now justified by faith since, Perkins writes: 'Christ performed obedience to the law for vs, as it is the satisfaction of the law' (I, 81; II, 234). In justification the power of the moral law to accuse, terrify and condemn us (II, 213) is at an end. 'To them that beleeeue,' wrote Perkins, 'there is full redemption from the curse of the law' (II, 237).

### The Shape of Sanctification

In his section on 'Justification' in *A Golden Chaine*, Perkins dealt with the objection that 'if then Christ performed the law for vs, we are no more bounded to the obseruance of the same' (I, 81). To this he responded that whilst Christ has obeyed the law on behalf of the sinner and while God accepts this obedience in place of the sinner's disobedience, 'the faithfull they are bounded to obedience, not as it is satisfactorie, but as it is a document of faith, and a testimony of their gratitude towards God, or a meanes to edifie their neighbours' (I, 81). Believers thus obey God and obey God's law as a response of gratitude to God for their salvation.

It is this understanding that preserves a rightful place for the moral law in the Christian life according to William Perkins. Like Calvin he saw Christian believers as to be concerned with keeping the moral law, not as a means to salvation but as a fruit of salvation. Stoeffler's 'Piety of the Law' in Perkins is this concern for Christian obedience.

Theologically, the place for the moral law in the Christian life

<sup>23</sup> The power of Christ's resurrection was strong to Perkins. He wrote that with it, 'then was the beginning of the new world, as it were,' II, 250-251.

takes shape in the doctrine of sanctification.<sup>24</sup> As Perkins defined them, whereas in justification 'such as beleuee, are accounted iust before God, through the obedience of Christ Iesus,' (I, 81) in sanctification 'such as beleuee, being deliuered from the tyrannie of sinne, are by little and little reneu'd in holinesse and righteousness' (I, 83). Sanctification in Perkin's Ramist scheme in *A Golden Chaine* is one of the four degrees of the declaration of God's love in those riper years (as opposed to infants). God's love and the declaration of God's love are the two parts of the 'degrees of Election.'<sup>25</sup>

Sanctification has two parts. Mortification is the process 'whereby the power of sinne is abated, and crucified in the faithfull.' The second part is vivification whereby 'inherent holines being begun, is still augmented and enlarged.' The means of vivification lead believers 'to rise vp to newnesse of life' (I, 83; cf. II, 216). One of the parts of vivification is 'the holinesse of renuing of the mind, which is the illumination thereof, to the knowledge of the will of God,' Perkins here citing Ps. 1:1: 'But his delight is in the Law of God, and in that Law doth he exercise himselfe day and night' and Ps. 119:15: 'I will meditate in thy precepts, and consider thy waies.' He also referred to the whole of Ps. 107 (I, 83-84).

From sanctification, Perkins wrote, 'repentance is derived' (I, 84). While in 'the order of nature,' repentance 'followeth both faith and sanctification,' it is practically speaking the first sign of sanctification in the Christian life. Repentance is quite simply 'when a sinner turneth to the Lord.' 'The fruit of repentance, is a Christian conversation,' whereby an 'amendment of life' is made (Mt. 3:8) and Christians, following Christ's example, 'performe new obedience to God' (II, 85).

The place of the moral law now in the Christian life is captured by Perkins in this case when he writes of the requirments of 'new obedience vnto God in our life and conuersation' (II, 16). The first is that the obedience be the keeping of euery commandement of God' (citing Jas. 2:10). Thirdly, 'in new obedience, the whole man must endeauour to keepe the whole law in his minde, wil, affections, and all the faculties of soule and body' (see the example of Josiah cited in II Ki. 23:25). In this the comprehensiveness of

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<sup>24</sup> Perkins' doctrine of sanctification is dealt with in Mark Randolph Shaw, 'The Marrow of Practical Divinity: A Study in the Theology of William Perkins,' Diss. Westminster Theological Seminary, 1981. Cf. his 'Drama in the Meeting House: The Concept of Conversion in the Theology of William Perkins,' *Westminster Theological Journal*, 45, 1983, 41-72.

<sup>25</sup> For the Ramist-type chart of this section see Figure B.



the moral law for the regenerate, Christian life is seen in all its fullness. For the Christian, true obedience to God which is part of one's sanctification, a fruit of repentance, amounts to complete obedience to the law that God has revealed. To anchor this point even more strongly, Perkins says of the prescription to keep the whole law in mind, will, affections and all faculties of soul and body that here 'is the very forme and life of new obedience' (II, 16).<sup>26</sup>

### The Significance of Perkins' Views

William Perkins' views of the Christian life expressed through his prominent concern for the moral law and the whole process of sanctification were important formative factors in the development of English Puritanism in the sixteenth century. His influence on seventeenth-century Puritans, especially in America, was substantial as well.<sup>27</sup> Recently scholars have tried to assess Perkins' views in comparison with those of other leading Reformed theologians such as John Calvin and Theodore Beza.<sup>28</sup> Some have argued that on certain points such as Perkins' views of faith, preparation for salvation, regeneration, assurance and the assurance of salvation he stood closer to the views of Beza than to Calvin's and thus he spawned an 'experimental predestinarian tradition' marked by introspection which could lead to legalism.<sup>29</sup> It

<sup>26</sup> As Perkins also put it: The Law serves as a rule of good life . . . so that though a regenerate may be not vnder the law, in regard of iustification, or accusation, or coercion, or condemnation: yet he is vnder it, in regard of direction, and instruction, for it shews what is good, what is euill, what we ought to doe, and what to leaue vndone,' II, 366.

<sup>27</sup> The eminent historian Christopher Hill called Perkins 'the most famous of all Puritan divines.' For some forty years after his death in 1602, Perkins is said to have been 'the dominant influence in Puritan thought.' See Christopher Hill, *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (New York, 1970), p. 38 and his *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (1964; rpt. London, 1969), p. 216. Perkins' work on preaching, *The Arte of Prophesying*, is said to have been found 'on nearly every book-list in early New England.' See Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans The Colonial Experience* (New York, 1958), p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> See particularly the work of R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, 1979) and his 'The Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology,' *John Calvin His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids, 1982), pp. 199-214 as well as W. H. Chalker, 'Calvin and Some Seventeenth Century English Calvinists,' Diss. Duke University, 1961. Kendall's views are challenged by Paul Helm, 'Calvin, English Calvinism and the Logic of Doctrinal Development,' *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 34, 1981, 179-185.

<sup>29</sup> See Kendall, *Calvin*, pp. 75-76 and Part III. Those in this tradition according to Kendall include Paul Baynes, Richard Sibbes, John Preston and Thomas Hooker.

is not possible here to enter into the intricacies of these questions. But from this study of Perkins on the moral law and sanctification, certain notes emerge.

First, Perkins maintained and furthered the positive emphasis on the law that is a significant mark of Calvin and the Reformed tradition. This was Calvin's 'third use' and 'principle use' of the law (see above n. 2). Against the disjunctions of law and Gospel found in the Lutheran tradition as well as the emphases of Gospel over law found in forms of Anabaptism, Perkins linked law and Gospel via the moral law and thus gave the law an important, functional place in the Christian life. This was true theologically where the law points to the shape of Christian obedience to the will of God as well as ethically where it serves as a guide for Christian living. Perkins' concern for pastoral theology and care through his 'cases of conscience' relied upon the law as a major norm for decision-making by Christians.<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, Perkins' doctrine of the law shows the law to have an evangelical purpose. For Perkins, one function of the moral law for unbelievers was to convict one of sin and show the condemnation that is rightly deserved by the sinner. Yet the very purpose of this condemnation is to point to the 'full redemption from the curse of the law' found in Jesus Christ (II, 237). For in Christ, the penalty of the moral law that stood over the sinner and condemned one's lack of obedience is now abrogated. The sinner is saved by God's grace in Jesus Christ through faith. Christ has obeyed the law on the sinner's behalf and by faith redemption is secured. Calvin had taught the same doctrine.<sup>31</sup> Calvin did not teach, as Perkins did, that there was a two-fold covenant, of works and grace (though Perkins taught this covenant of works was related to the moral law found in the Ten Commandments and not a covenant made for all humanity with Adam in Paradise).<sup>32</sup> But both Perkins' emphasis on the covenant of grace

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<sup>30</sup> This emphasis, however, does not obscure the Perkin's underlying theological view developed in the following point which was Calvin's as well, namely, that grace is the context in which the law was given.

<sup>31</sup> See Calvin, *Institutes* II. 7. 3-9. It is hard to understand how Kendall misses this note in Calvin. It is Calvin's 'first use' of the law which 'condemns, every man of his own unrighteousness' and in the law like in a mirror, 'we contemplate our weakness, then the iniquity arising from this, and finally the curse coming from both,' (II. vii. 6, 7). Kendall says simply that Calvin's first use was that the law 'shows the righteousness that is acceptable to God,' *Calvin*, p. 27. His argument is that whereas Calvin taught the priority of grace over law, Perkins, like Beza and the Heidelberg theologians, reversed the order by propounding 'the need for the Law to precede the Gospel in bringing men to Christ,' pp. 59-60.

<sup>32</sup> See McKim, 'Covenant,' p. 86. Cf. Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-*

and his stress on how God has provided for salvation in Christ so that the curse of the law is abrogated in justification show his concern to ground even the moral law in God's ultimate purpose of grace in Jesus Christ.<sup>33</sup>

Thirdly, Perkins' views on sanctification made repentance a dynamic and powerful force in the Christian life. This he did by emphasizing along with Calvin that repentance *follows* faith. Calvin claimed that faith and repentance although 'held together by a permanent bond, require to be joined rather than confused,' but that also one could not apply one's self seriously to repentance 'without knowing himself to belong to God.'<sup>34</sup> Repentance was regeneration for Calvin and as he wrote, 'repentance not only constantly follows faith, but is also born of faith.'<sup>35</sup> For Perkins too, faith is prior to repentance and thus repentance flows from faith. Just as 'so soon as there is fire so soon it is hot: and so soon as man is regenerate so soon he repents,' wrote Perkins (I, 455). The effect of linking repentance and new obedience which Perkins put as the 'fruit of repentance' (II, 85; cf. II, 16) as the immediate outgrowth of repentance was to dramatize dramatically the reality of conversion, the 'new birth' or 'justification.'<sup>36</sup> The immediate effects of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit became apparent in the forsaking of sin, renewal in 'holiness and righteousness' (I, 83) and 'amendment of life' that included the sanctification of the mind, memory, conscience, will and affections (I, 370-371; Figure B below). For both Perkins (III, 42\*) and Calvin, this inextricably joined justification and sanctification since these both stemmed from God's act and gift in Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup> The proper activism of the Christian life through the energizing work of the Holy Spirit began with repentance. Repentance as a genuine *metanoia* or change of life direction had far-ranging and far-reaching consequences for one's entire existence. In repentance one sees a personal, conscious response to the evangelical Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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*Calvinism in English Nonconformity 1689-1765* (London, 1967) for a discussion of the development of the 'covenant of works' in 'Hyper-Calvinism.'

<sup>33</sup> Shaw notes the safeguards in Perkins' thought that prevented it from becoming legalism. See Shaw, 'Drama,' pp. 68ff.

<sup>34</sup> See Calvin, *Institutes*, III. 3. 5; III. 3. 2.

<sup>35</sup> See *Institutes*, III. 3. 9 and III. 3. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Shaw writes that 'this placement of repentance after faith and the identification of the moment of new birth with the simple desire to believe guards Perkins from a general charge levelled at Puritan theology that they "load conversion" by requiring believers to be pre-sanctified before they could be considered saved.' See 'Drama,' p. 66.

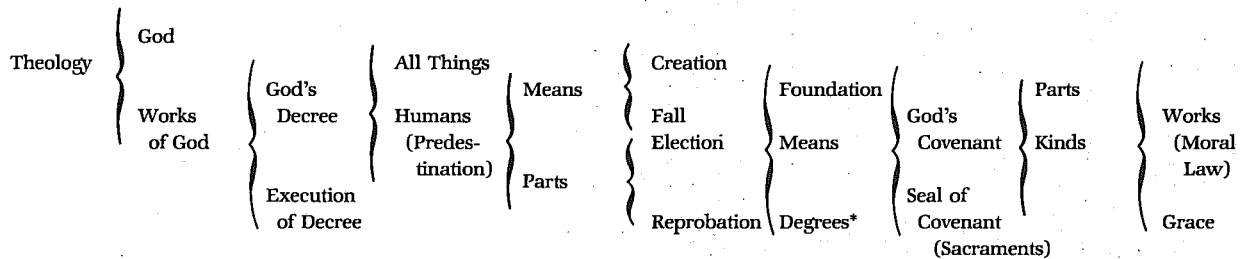
<sup>37</sup> Victor Priebe has written: 'It is significant therefore, that while Perkins makes a logical distinction between the work of God in justification, and

Thus the teachings of William Perkins about the Christian life, particularly the place of the moral law and the nature of sanctification, held an important place in the development of evangelical and Reformed theology. By his stress on the moral law in the lives of believers, Perkins showed how for the Christian, right belief and right action went together. By his focus on the goal of the law—to lead us to Jesus Christ—Perkins taught that the law's last word was not condemnation but redemption and justification in Christ for those who believe. By his emphasis on repentance as the first sign of God's work of sanctification in the believer, Perkins helped Christians understand that a relationship with Jesus Christ propels one into a new life-style which begins with the renunciation of sin and a new life of obedience to Jesus Christ. This is a new life that takes seriously both law and Gospel. It is a Christian life whereby the Christian is 'by little and little inabled through the spirit of Christ to desire and approue that which is good, & to walke in it' (I, 370).

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sanctification, they are in reality part of the same gift, Christ Jesus, who is received in the moment of entrance into the covenant of grace. Again, Perkins takes a position identical to that of Calvin at this point, so that William Niesel's conclusion concerning Calvin can be applied with equal validity to Perkins when he writes: "There is only one sufficient reason for God's verdict of justification, our union with Christ. He alone is the guarantor of our sanctification . . . In Him, and only in Him, justification and sanctification are one." See V. L. Priebe, 'The Covenant Theology of William Perkins,' Diss. Drew University, 1946, pp. 137-138 and Shaw, 'Drama,' p. 69.

**FIGURE A – A PARTIAL CHART OF WILLIAM PERKINS, A *GOLDEN CHAINE* (1)**



(\* See Figure B)

**FIGURE B – A PARTIAL CHART OF WILLIAM PERKINS, A *GOLDEN CHAINE* (2)**

