

# *The Gospel Standard Baptist Library*

Newsletter Number 9

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## **Introduction**

This issue of the Newsletter is largely given over to new books recently acquired by the Library. To set one of the books in context—on the Westminster Assembly—we have given the background to the picture of the Assembly which hangs on the back wall of the Library. A short piece on Robert Hawker is included, but our regular features, on books on specific doctrines and on the writings of various of the Puritans, will continue in the next issue, Dv.

## **The Westminster Assembly**

Visitors to the Gospel Standard Library will know that the end of the Library is dominated by a splendid etching of a famous painting of the Westminster Assembly. The original picture was painted for the new House of Common's building by the Victorian artist, John R. Herbert. It features many of the leading puritans of the period, including some who never attended the Westminster Assembly (e.g. Oliver Cromwell, John Milton and John Owen). The painting is of the assertion of the doctrine of Liberty of Conscience by the Independent Divines at the Assembly.



The Assertion of Liberty of Conscience by the Independents at the Assembly

The Westminster Assembly was called by Parliament with the aim of reforming the Articles of the Church of England, to allow uniformity of religion across the United Kingdom. The aim was to find consensus, and produce articles of faith to which all could agree, so there would have been one British Church. While there was much common ground, essentially on the fundamental areas of truth (the Trinity, the Person and work of Christ, the doctrines of Grace, etc.) there were areas of significant disagreement on other areas (e.g. church order, baptism, the office of the ministry). As the majority of the Assembly members were Presbyterian, the consensus in these areas quickly tended towards Presbyterian conclusions. The Independents at the Assembly (men such as Philip Nye and Thomas Goodwin) asserted against the potential forced uniformity in these areas (Baptism, church government etc), the doctrine of the liberty of conscience in these areas of truth non-essential to salvation. As Baptists, and Independents, this stand at the Westminster Assembly is historically very important to us. We must value that we have liberty of conscience, and have not been forced to give up Believer's Baptism by immersion, nor are we persecuted for practising what we believe is the Scriptural doctrine.

The Library has recently purchased a new book by Christopher Coldwell, *The Westminster Assembly's Grand Debate*, which brings together much original, rare, source material on the debate surrounding church government and liberty of conscience at the Westminster Assembly. It is perhaps not for beginners, but for those wanting to know more about this period of our church history, we would recommend: *The History of the Westminster Assembly* by William Hetherington, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines* by James Reid, and Daniel Neal's *History of the Puritans*. It should be borne in mind that these are generally not written from a viewpoint favourable to the Independents or Baptists.

The documents produced by the Westminster Assembly remain important statements of the Reformed Faith. The Library has copies of all of them. The *Shorter Catechism*, learned by many children in their childhood, gives many valuable brief statements of key doctrines. Everybody should read this short summary of Christian Doctrine. For those wanting more in depth treatments of doctrine, the *Larger Catechism* and the *Confession of Faith* are the places to look. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* was amended by the Independents to suit their viewpoint as the *Savoy Confession*, and by the Baptists as the *1689 Baptist Confession*. It is through the latter we trace the origin of our own articles of faith to the *Westminster Confession*, and several of our articles adopt some of the wording of the confession.

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## New and Noteworthy Books

This year the Library has purchased a number of new books to supplement its collections. These included the following titles:

*The Heavenly Conference* by Richard Sibbes (1577-1635). Recently highly reviewed in the Gospel Standard, this is a choice little book on the meeting between Jesus and Mary Magdalene in the Garden on the Resurrection morning.

Two Scottish Books: *Men of Lewis* by Norman MacFarlane, brief biographical sketches of the godly inhabitants of the Isle of Lewis in former years. The Library has several similar books covering Skye, Sutherland and Caithness. *Eternal Realities*

contains experimental sermons preached by the well-known Archibald Cook (1788-1865) of Daviot, translated from Gaelic for the first time. The Library also has an interesting biography of Cook—*One of Heaven's Jewels*.

Two important books by early Baptists: *The Heavenly Trade* by Bartholomew Ashwood (minister at Axminster and well known to those who have read Kenneth Howard's *Axminster Ecclesiastica*), and *Christian Geography*, sermons by Thomas Hardcastle, the Baptist pastor at Broadmead Bristol during the 1670s. Thomas Hardcastle was imprisoned for his faith and wrote many beautiful letters to his congregation. These can be read in the Library's copy of *The Broadmead Records* (Underhill Ed.). *Christian Geography* is a small volume of his practical sermons.



Archibald Cook

*Sacred Dissertations on the Lord's Prayer* by Hermann Witsius. Witsius (1636-1708) was a Dutch minister, best known for his two volume: *On the Oeconomy of the Covenants*. He is surprisingly easy to read, and always profitable. Many of his books are split into short numbered paragraphs aiding the reader immensely. His writings were especially admired by John Gill. We would highly recommend any book written by Witsius to our readers.

*Godly Prayer and its Answers* by John Brown. Brown (1610-1679) was a godly covenanter and minister of Wamphray in Scotland. The Library has some other of his writings, including his well-known *Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life*.

*A Clear and Simple Treatise on the Lord's Supper* by Theodore Beza. Beza (1519-1605) was Calvin's successor in Geneva. Unlike Calvin, few of Beza's works have been translated into English. This volume is important, although not easy reading. The doctrine of the Lord's Supper was at the very centre of the Reformation. Those wanting to start on Beza's writings would do best to start with his biography of John Calvin, or *The Christian Faith*—a short introduction to the major doctrines of the Reformation.

*The Atonement Controversy* by Owen Thomas. Translated from the Welsh for the first time, this details the controversy which overtook Wales concerning the extent of the atonement during the nineteenth century. Christmas Evans was a key player. A theological book, but important. It shows the struggles against Fullerism, and the stand made for a true understanding of the Atonement.

The Library also continues to acquire books given to them as gifts, or direct from the publishers. Further acquisitions gained through these channels recently, include John MacKenzie's *Life and Sermons* (previously rare and uncollected sermons by an early editor of *The Gospel Standard*), *Sermons by Malcolm MacSween* (former minister in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in Oban), a run of ten bound volumes of back issues of *The Bible League Quarterly* magazine, *Bible Thoughts* by Joseph Caryl (short extracts from his commentary on Job—would make ideal daily devotional reading), the final volume of *Pastor's Letters to the Young* by Mr Timothy Pocock (South Moreton).

At every annual meeting of the trustees, possible suggestions for book purchases are made. Any suggestions that the readers of this newsletter might like to make, would be welcomed by the trustees, and any donations towards the purchase of new books would be gratefully received.

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## Robert Hawker

Robert Hawker (1753-1827) will be well-known to readers of the Gospel Standard. Minister in the Church of England at Charles Chapel, Plymouth, he was a friend of several Strict Baptist ministers and is mentioned in the biographies of both William Gadsby and John Warburton. The Gospel Standard Trust have recently published a volume of his meditations on the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus—*Consider Him*.



Robert Hawker

He wrote a number of books which contain the phrase “Poor Man” in the title. These were experimental and designed for the Lord’s poor people; consequently they are easy to read. They included a commentary—*The Poor Man’s Commentary* (not a technical, but a devotional commentary which could be profitably read alongside daily Scripture readings as the comments are short). Some of the Commentary has been published in separate volumes e.g. Psalms and the Song of Solomon—both especially worth reading. He also wrote a Poor Man’s Portion book of daily readings. There are a number of experimental treatises on Christian Experience, spiritualising various occupations (and they are semi-autobiographical) - the *Sailor Pilgrim*, *Zion’s Pilgrim* and *Zion’s warrior*. The Library also has a number of volumes of his edifying sermons. Some of these are on specific subjects, such as the Divinity of Christ. We would highly recommend all his writings to our readers.

### How to Use the Library

**Borrowing Books:** To borrow any of the books mentioned in this newsletter, you do not have to visit the Library, or become a subscriber. Simply phone or email the librarian (contact details below) with the book title you wish to borrow and your address. The book will be posted to you free of charge. Return postage is paid and you have three months to read the book. Similarly, you can borrow any book from the catalogue (except those marked as being in the reserved collection); the catalogue is available on the website.

**Surplus Books:** The Library regularly receives books surplus to requirements and these are sold to raise money for the maintenance and expansion of the Library’s collection and general upkeep. A catalogue is regularly produced.

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