

## Introduction

Spirituality is a phenomenon that has touched both the Protestant and Catholic branches<sup>1</sup> of Christianity. Spirituality is hard to define accurately,<sup>2</sup> but in both Protestant and Catholic circles particular characteristics are common. The characteristics of prayer, meditation, contemplation, mysticism, asceticism, and a drive for perfection accompany all forms of Christian spirituality. Protestant spirituality can be generally categorized into mystical or “meditative” spirituality, and energetic or “missionary” spirituality.<sup>3</sup>

This essay will inspect eighteenth century English meditative spirituality, as found in the works of the greatest writer of this tradition, William Law (1686-1761).<sup>4</sup> In doing so I will first give a brief sketch of William Law’s life; then, secondly, explain and review his doctrine of the atonement and union with God. I must point out that these two doctrines are ultimate to all forms spirituality because they configure the paradigm for their doctrine of the Christian life; a life of disciplined self sacrifice, which was epitomized by Jesus on the cross, and a life of the here-and-now experience of complete love in oneness with God.

### The Life of William Law (1686-1761)

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<sup>1</sup> There are numerous schools of spirituality within Roman Catholicism today. Cistercian, Carmelite, Marian and Jesuit spirituality make up the majority of the Roman Catholic preoccupation with spirituality.

<sup>2</sup> Many equate pietism with spirituality, and to some degree this is justified, particularly in Protestantism where the term has been widely used. However, one must keep in mind the difference between “pietism” and “piety”. Pietism in Protestantism is associated with meditative mystical spirituality. Pietism began in seventeenth century Germany and distinctively expressed itself in the Moravians of the eighteenth century. Piety, however, is not a philosophy but a Christian way of life. The Puritans, for example urged Christians unto piety, but it was not couched in meditative mystical spirituality, but in the objective Word of God and gospel.

<sup>3</sup> David Lyle Jeffrey divides spirituality into the “meditative” and “missionary” categories. But he is quick to point out that “a missionary oriented spirituality [like that of Isaac Watts, and the Wesley’s] has almost always had its origin in a profound encounter with meditative spirituality - an emphasis on the workings of the Spirit in the inner life, on the psychology of spiritual response, and on the intimate experience of the personhood of Jesus.” David Lyle Jeffrey, *English Spirituality*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987). Pg. 25. In my observation, meditative spirituality is always mystical, and is usually accompanied with perfectionist doctrine.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey comments on Law’s significance. “William Law...is the outstanding spiritual writer of the nonjuror right wing of the Anglican church, and perhaps the outstanding spiritual writer of the age.” Jeffrey, 27. Jeffrey also records what Aldous Huxley said about Law’s writings. “He [Law] is one of the greatest masters of devotion and philosophical theology is passed over almost in silence.” Jeffrey, 120. **William Law falls into the category of mystical or “meditative” spirituality.**

William Law was born at King's Cliff, England to parents who owned a grocery store. His parents were very religious and taught William the doctrines in the *Prayer Book*. His parents saw him as an exceptional child, and consequently did all they could to further his education in theology. In 1705 William entered Emmanuel College, graduating with a Master of Arts seven years later.

Law's political convictions contributed to his life of semi-monastic seclusion. Law was a nonjuror who believed in the "divine right of kings," and consequently supported James II, and his successors. Law made his nonjuror convictions known in a university speech in 1713, which cost him his position and degree from Emmanuel College. That summer he also began to preach about his political conviction, and was subsequently forbidden to preach. Hence, due to his loyalty to the Stuart dynasty, in 1714 Law refused to take the Oath of Allegiance and Supremacy to William and Mary which isolated him from both the intellectual and religious life of England.

From this point on, Law spent his life in quiet, but ascetic seclusion.<sup>5</sup> In 1727 he became private tutor to the Edward Gibbon family at Putney, a position he held for ten years. When Edward Gibbon died in 1737, Law left Putney but where he went no one is sure. Law next appears in his home village of Kings Cliffe where he would live in seclusion with two women until his death in 1761. Describing this situation, Austin Warren writes,

About 1740, Miss Hester Gibbon, the historian's aunt, and Mrs. Hutchenson, a rich and pious widow, took a house in Law's native village, Kings Cliffe, and the celibate Law joined them as their spiritual director and chaplain. This small household, a kind of 'Protestant nunnery,' resembled the community of Nicholas Ferrer at Little Gidding and continued that 17<sup>th</sup> century experiment in 'holy living' into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, forming a link between it and the revival of the monastic life after the Oxford movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Law did begin a private school for girls at Kings Cliffe in 1727, after he had received a gift of 1,000 pounds from an anonymous person who had read his *Christian Perfection*. How much personal attention he gave it, or how successful it was I have not been able to find out in all my research. Jeffrey is the only one who mentions it. See pp. 118-19.

<sup>6</sup> Austin Warren, "Introduction" *The Classics of Western Spirituality: William Law, A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life & The Spirit of Love*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1978). Pg, 14.

Before I turn to the theology of Law, certain facts concerning the state of Christianity in England during Law's life must be listed. Firstly, Law's theology, just as John Wesley's theology and work must be set in their historical context. Both Law and Wesley fought against the theological rationalism which permeated theology and church life. It had fostered apathy and deism within the established church, but it had also pushed personal experiential religion into the arena of ridiculousness.<sup>7</sup> Law had been a rationalist in his early life, but as he progressed in his knowledge he turned from that rationalism towards a religion of the heart.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, poverty and licentious living characterized the life of many in England. Though Law did not physically aid in easing poverty or actively denounce human exploitation and animal cruelty,<sup>9</sup> as the Wesley's did, he nevertheless wrote against the privation of the human being. In his most popular work, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* Law confronted that sin of his day. In particular, Law was critical of the leisured class and the hypocritical church goers. In one place he wrote, "He that dares not to say an ill-natured word or do an unreasonable thing because he considers God to be everywhere present performs a better devotion than he that dares not to miss church."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey points out that John Locke, the Enlightenment philosopher had led this charge. "He [Locke] said, reason must be our last judge and guide in everything." Jeffrey, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Deism, a form of rationalism in religious garb was a great threat that hung over Christianity during this period. However, the Deists lost the battle in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But as A. Skevington Wood remarks, "they lost, not because of the apologists, but because of the revival and its emphasis upon spirituality and the heart. And the connecting bridge between rationalism to spirituality was William Law." A. Skevington Wood. *The Inextinguishable Blaze: Spiritual Renewal and Advance in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960). Pg. 34ff. I agree with Wood on this point. Law directly influenced all the figures of the revival. His writings, particularly his *Christian Perfection* and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* were read by both Wesley's, Whitefield, Selina Countess of Huntington, Watts, Newton, Fletcher etc.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey, pp. 8-12.

<sup>10</sup> William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. In *The Classics of Western Spirituality*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1978). Pg., 139.

The influences which shaped Law must also be noted. There are five distinct influences which embedded themselves into Law's thinking. The first was the *Book of Common Prayer*. Secondly, the Caroline Divines, who supported Charles I and II, and promoted High Church principles. Thirdly, Madam Guyon, the French mystical writer whom he called "illuminated"<sup>11</sup> also affected him. Fourthly, and very importantly, Law drew heavily from Roman Catholic mystical writings.<sup>12</sup> Lastly, the greatest influence on Law was the Lutheran mystic Jacob Boehme. Toward the end of Law's career, Boehme's extreme dualistic mysticism appealed to him. Law's last work, *The Spirit of Love* shows that Law forsook the more practical approach to Christianity as given in his early work *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, for an extreme form of mysticism.

#### William Law's Theology of Atonement and Union With God

In explaining Law's doctrine of the atonement and union with God, two principle sources will be used. The first is Law's, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* written in 1728, and the second is, *The Spirit of Love* written in 1754.<sup>13</sup> I will also occasionally use Law's book, *A Practical Treatise Upon Christian Perfection* as found in Jeffrey's *English Spirituality*.

#### *Law's Theology of Atonement*

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<sup>11</sup> Warren, 23.

<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey notes that Law was influenced by the spiritual writings of Thomas a Kempis, Pascal and writers from the "Messieurs de Port Royal." Pg, 27-28.

<sup>13</sup> Both of these works are found in, *The Classics of Western Spirituality*. Paul G. Stanwood. Ed., (New York: Paulist Press, 1978). From this point on, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* will be from this edition indicated as *SC*. Similarly, *The Spirit of Love* will also be from this edition but indicated as *SL*.

The Enlightenment and the rationalism which flowed from it, sought to destroy the orthodox doctrine of the atonement. This attack led German pietism to adopt a subjectivist view of Christ's atonement which focussed on human needs and the love of God. The watchword of Pietism was not "justification by faith," but the "new birth" which took place in man through the love of God.<sup>14</sup> Gustaf Aulen asserts that the pietistic understanding of the atonement centred upon two points. First, "a more human idea of the atonement was propounded, to replace the accepted 'juridical' treatment,"<sup>15</sup> and secondly, the idea that God is love, not wrath was highlighted. The Pietist's believed that "the idea of God that lay behind the Orthodox doctrine of the atonement was inconsistent with the 'simple teaching' of Jesus, and the love of the Heavenly Father. It was therefore intolerable that God should be thought of as needing to be 'propitiated' through a satisfaction offered to Him."<sup>16</sup> Fundamentally, the ruling idea in a pietistic view of the atonement is anthropocentric and moralistic. Man responds to God's love and then God responds to man by blessing him. Alister E. McGrath comes to the same conclusion in his scholarly work, *Justitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*.<sup>17</sup> There he gives five characteristics which describe the Pietist's view of justification,

(1) Faith is understood to be active rather than passive in justification. (2) The necessity for personal piety led to the articulation of the doctrine of perfection...excluded by Orthodoxy. (3) The concept of vicarious satisfaction is rejected, and detrimental to personal piety.<sup>18</sup> (4) The concept of imputed

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<sup>14</sup> Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor*. (The Macmillan Company, 1969). pp. 133-34.

<sup>15</sup> Aulen, 134.

<sup>16</sup> Aulen, 134.

<sup>17</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Justitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*. Vol.2. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>18</sup> McGrath further notes that this was the belief of John Wesley. He writes, "To Wesley, the assertion that Christ had fulfilled the law on man's behalf appeared to imply that man was no longer under any obligation to fulfill it. It is this consideration which underlies Wesley's discussion of the law *sub loco sanctificationis*." McGrath, 52. James Buchanan exposes Wesley's error on this point. See, James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*. (London: Banner of Truth, 1961). pp. 192-4.

righteousness is rejected. (5) Personal holiness was necessary.<sup>19</sup>

Putting all this together, McGrath concludes that,

The Pietist emphasis upon the priority and necessity of piety, virtue and obedience on the part of believers is significant..in that it provides a direct link with the moralism of the *Aufklärung*.<sup>20</sup> If an 'active faith' is to be accepted as the arbiter and criterion of justification, in the quasi-Arminian sense often found in the writings of the Pietists, it may be concluded that the practice of piety by an individual is an adequate demonstration of his faith. In other words, the ethical renewal f the individual both causes and demonstrates his justification.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> McGrath, 52.

<sup>20</sup> This is a German term stemming from the Enlightenment. It refers to the idea of the illumination of reason at every stage in human development. With the leading principle of rationality, those of the Enlightenment maintained that as reason developed, morality would coincidentally develop.

<sup>21</sup> McGrath, 53. One can see that Pietism is not new. This same doctrine of justification and atonement dominated the Anabaptists of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. See my essay, *The Theology of Menno Simons*. (Written for Haddington House, 2002).

These same ideas of the doctrine of the atonement, and consequently, justification permeated the theology of Law. Law, and many others in the “meditative mystical” school maintained the Pietistic doctrine of the atonement. First of all, for Law man was the centre of the atonement because of his misery, not because of his original sin. Law defined sin in man as self love, misery, wrath, sorrow, and a negation of all that is good.<sup>22</sup> Basically, sin is *the* disease in man which offends God, deprives men of happiness, and for which atonement must be made, not the radical sinful nature of man. Law wrote, “for all sin, whether sensuality, pride, or falseness, or any other irregular passion, are not else but the filth and impure disease of the *rational* soul.”<sup>23</sup> [Italics added] In his latter more mystical works, sin is personified as “the father, the first cause, and beginner of all the materiality of this world,”<sup>24</sup> yet he did not directly link sin to man’s nature. In his, *Practical Treatise Upon Christian Perfection* Law’s Armenian view of man was displayed. When he chided those who did not strive after holiness he said, “It is not because they lack good character...but it is because they lack the first principles of common sense: they wont so much as ask what those things are which they are labouring after...We must not therefore complain of the weakness and ignorance of our nature.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> SC, 104-05, 94, 102, 110, 236, 335; SL, 439, 440, 399, 487,494.

<sup>23</sup> SC, 335.

<sup>24</sup> SL, 370.

<sup>25</sup> Jeffrey, 124.

Secondly, for Law man was the centre of the atonement because of his need, and ability of salvation. As to necessity, salvation was not directly linked to man's guilt, or God's work of propitiation. According to Law, salvation was needful to deliver man from his misery. The gospel brought a union between the divine and human life which in turn brought happiness to the sinner. With regard to ability, Law believed man to be central to his own salvation. In both his early and latter writings, Law believed that the way of salvation was through moralism. In *SC*, Flavia, a personification of a worldly person, did not find the way of salvation, "for her whole life is in direct opposition to all those tempers and practices which the gospel has made necessary to salvation."<sup>26</sup> In his latter work, *SL*, his Arminianism came to its full conclusion. There he wrote, "To seek your salvation...cease crossing the seas to find out a new Luther or Calvin..the truth is within you. For salvation or damnation is no outward thing that is brought into you from without, but is only that which springs up within you as the birth and state of your own life."<sup>27</sup> Law followed the Caroline Divines in maintaining a doctrine moralistic justification.<sup>28</sup> McGrath notes that they, (1) "treated justification as both an event and a process, subsuming regeneration or sanctification," and (2) "that both faith and works are held to be involved in man's justification."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *SC*, 108.

<sup>27</sup> *SL*, 411.

<sup>28</sup> See *SC*, 51, 65-66, 287, 284; *SL*, 362, 377, 411-12, 485-97.

<sup>29</sup> McGrath, 109.

Thirdly, the love of God was central to the atonement of Christ. Law rejected the Reformed Orthodox doctrine of forensic justification, and vicarious atonement. Concerning the legalistic view of the atonement he wrote, “It is the grossest of all fictions, clearly contrary to the Word of God.”<sup>30</sup> He asserted that the love and mercy of God shown toward man are not purchased for the sinner by the death of Christ, rather, “the incarnation and sufferings of Christ came from and are given to us by the infinite antecedent love of God for us and are the gracious effects of His one love and goodness towards us.”<sup>31</sup> The doctrine of God’s wrath and subsequent judgment of man’s sin in Christ upon the cross was offensive to Law. To him, it was blasphemous to attribute wrath to God Himself, because “the very nature of the atonement absolutely shows that that which is to be atoned cannot possibly be in God not even in any good being...wrath, therefore, is not in God, for God cannot will the removal or alteration of anything that is in Himself.”<sup>32</sup> Law also denied the imputed righteousness of Christ which was achieved by the atonement of Christ. Righteousness is not imputed, but it is something within the sinner which works itself out in a life of holiness. In his early works Law greatly emphasized righteousness as a state of life before God, and that the benefits of Christ are received upon obedience.<sup>33</sup> Later, under the influence of Boehme, Law began to think of righteousness in terms of a mystical union with Christ, “Christ given *for* us is neither more nor less than Christ given *into* us.”<sup>34</sup>

In all of these ideas Law was unorthodox. He rejected the doctrine of original sin, putting in its place an Arminian understanding of man’s condition being diseased, yet able to

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<sup>30</sup> SC, 93.

<sup>31</sup> SC, 93.

<sup>32</sup> SL, 431.

<sup>33</sup> SC, 284. Cf., 67, 305, 100-02.

<sup>34</sup> SL, 30.

follow after righteousness if given the proper motivation. His view of the atonement was non-biblical in its focus. For him, Christ's work on the cross was not to satisfy the justice of God by paying for the sinner's debt, it was a personalized event where Christ's entire focus was man's deliverance from misery. Law believed that the righteousness of Christ is not imputed to the sinner, it is a state a sinner must achieve before salvation can come. Christ's atoning work then is not objective but subjective, because it is both, a sacrifice solely for man himself, and an example of righteousness to strive after.<sup>35</sup>

*Law's Theology of Union with God*

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<sup>35</sup> John Wesley, though greatly influenced by Law's earlier writings, nevertheless denounced Law's unorthodox view of the gospel. In a letter to Selina, Lady of Huntington, dated September 14, 1772 he wrote, "Mr. Law indeed flatly denies justification by faith." John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley in Twelve Volumes*. (Peabody Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984). Vol. 12., p. 463. Wesley also pointed out that Law denied the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. See vol.5, p. 243.

A characteristic that tainted English spirituality in the eighteenth century was the *striving* to be in union with God. There were different shades of emphases on this point. Those of the meditative mystical tradition, such as Elizabeth Rowe, and William Law embodied this doctrine as the primary channel for communion with God. Those of the missionary tradition such as John Wesley, and John Fletcher considered this doctrine as the foundational truth for Christian perfection. The meditative school understood union with God to mean “oneness” with God in love and emotion, whereas the missionary school understood union with God to mean “oneness” with God morally.<sup>36</sup> This is not to say that these two schools developed their teachings independent of each other. There was an organic connection between these two groups on the doctrine of union with God simply because the missionary school derived its understanding from the meditative school. What distinguished the two schools was the *outward* application of that doctrine.<sup>37</sup> I use the word outward because at its foundation, both schools viewed this doctrine in legalistic terms. William Law represented the doctrine of union with God in both legalistic and mystical terms, and influenced many in the missionary school.

To understand Law’s legalistic and mystical doctrine of union with God, his view of Christ’s role in the believer’s life must first be listed. In Law, as in all pietism, Jesus is held up as the perfect revelation or reflection of divine love, dedication, devotion and obedience, rather than the substitutionary sacrifice dying as a propitiatory offering for sin. Law called Jesus the “representative man.”<sup>38</sup> When dealing with following after Christ, Law emphasized the example

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<sup>36</sup> There is not enough space in this essay to fully discuss the teaching of Christian perfection as promoted in eighteenth century England. However, it must be noted that John Wesley’s teaching on this subject has its roots in the meditative mystical tradition. Jeffrey points out that Wesley’s doctrine of perfectionism has its roots the Eastern Orthodox teaching of deification, the writings of William Law, and the holiness doctrine of Jeremy Taylor. Jeffrey, 31-32.

<sup>37</sup> It should be remembered that both of these schools promoted a disciplined rigorous life of piety. Yet, the *goal* of that life differed. To Law, for instance, the disciplined life would lead one to a closer *personal* experience with God. But for Wesley, the goal was a moral life which would affect society. In this life of living holiness there would be a closer *personal* relationship with God.

<sup>38</sup> Donald G. Bloesh. *The Crisis of Piety*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968). Pg., 104.

of Christ,<sup>39</sup> but in doing so he destroyed justification by faith. Salvation by grace was replaced by obediently following the example of Christ. He asserted that,

the state of Christianity implieth nothing else but an entire, absolute conformity to that Spirit which Christ showed in the mysterious sacrifice of Himself upon the cross. Every man therefore is only so far a Christian as he partakes of this Spirit of Christ...And we are to suffer, to be crucified, to die and rise with Christ, or else His crucifixion, death, and resurrection will profit us nothing.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See *SC*, 52, 59, 83, 113, 132, 192, 240-42, 299; *SL*, 451, 489.

<sup>40</sup> *SC*, 241-42.

Secondly, for Law union with God involved Christ coming into to the soul and eradicating all sin. Law reasoned that when Christ came into a soul, the soul returned to its original state of righteousness, thereby eradicating sin. He wrote, “He [Christ] is our atonement and reconciliation with God, because by and through Him *brought to life in us*, we are set again in that first state of holiness.”<sup>41</sup> [italics added] However, that person who resists Christ, “keeps Immanuel from coming to life in the soul, and is a killer of the Lord of life.”<sup>42</sup> Christ is “brought to life” in the sinner precisely because Christ is hidden in the soul according to Law. “Unless there was this Seed of Christ or spark of heaven hidden in the soul, not the least beginning of man’s salvation or of Christ’s mediatorial office could begin.”<sup>43</sup>

Thirdly, Law conjectured that only love has the greatest power to effect man’s union with God. Love and its power was a theme throughout all of Law’s writings. For him it was the ultimate virtue through which all happiness and joy could come. Love was something in man, which gave assurance that he was united to God, but that love must be pure love as exemplified in Jesus in order to be affective.<sup>44</sup>

Fourthly, Law’s theology required personal purity for anyone desiring to be united with God.

Purification therefore is one thing necessary, and nothing will do in the stead of it.

But man is not purified till every earthly, wrathful, sensual, selfish, partial, self-willing temper is taken from him...and he is not alive in God till he is dead to them...For nothing impure or imperfect in its will and working can have any union with God.<sup>45</sup>

It is this foundational requirement for union with God that drives Law to his radical

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<sup>41</sup> *SL*, 361.

<sup>42</sup> *SL*, 361.

<sup>43</sup> *SL*, 406.

<sup>44</sup> *SC*, 290.

<sup>45</sup> *SL*, 365.

doctrine of Christian perfection. He writes in, *A Practical Treatise Upon Christian Perfection*, that a Christian is perfect when he departs from the world and all its desires, and the only difficulty in the way of Christian holiness is the world.<sup>46</sup> At this juncture Law's legalism constantly comes to the front. Perfection is required for union with God, but that union cannot be effected unless one lives as if he is united to God. Notice this comment from the above mentioned work.

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<sup>46</sup> Jeffrey, 138.

For no one can have any assurance that he pleases God, or puts himself within the terms of Christian salvation except one who serves God with his whole heart, and with the utmost of his strength. For though the Christian faith be a covenant of mercy for the pardon and salvation of frail and imperfect creatures, yet we cannot say that we are within the conditions of that mercy till we do all that we can in our frail and imperfect state.<sup>47</sup>

Fifthly, Law asserted the above point on the basis that the original union of Adam with God served as the paradigm for the sinners union with God. He reasoned that Adam lived perfectly before God before the fall, and that this original perfection was not completely eradicated in man after the fall. Rather, it “lies in him as a hidden, suppressed seed of goodness capable of being raised up to its first perfection”<sup>48</sup> through the example of Christ. Perfection is achievable because it was achieved in the first Adam was Law’s reasoning.<sup>49</sup>

This led Law to his sixth position on union with God. To him, true Christianity and human happiness is living in perfection with God. In explaining this position in his latter writings, Law fell into the error of pantheism, because this human necessity for union with God could only be achieved by God choosing to unite Himself with nature and all created life. This was again based on the paradigm of creation before the fall. Before the fall, all nature and created life enjoyed happiness because they were one with God, the only source of joy and happiness.<sup>50</sup> This of course coloured his doctrine of man, sin, and the atonement, because redemption did not involve reconciliation or propitiation in the biblical sense, but it involved the restitution of happiness. Actually the whole goal for the Christian life, for Law, was happiness and perfection in the subjective sense of the term. Wood records what Law wrote about the sole end of Christianity.

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<sup>47</sup> Jeffrey, 131.

<sup>48</sup> *SL*, 407.

<sup>49</sup> *SL*, pp., 407ff.

<sup>50</sup> *SL*, pp., 400ff.

This is the sole end of Christianity, to lead us from all thoughts or rest and repose here, to separate us from the world and worldly tempers, to deliver us from the folly of our passions, the slavery of our natures, the power of evil spirits, and unite us to God, the true Founder of all that is good.<sup>51</sup>

Law's doctrine of union with God has as its foundation, moral theology. Christ is highlighted as *the* example to follow, not the vicarious atonement given for sinners to redeem them from the law. Law failed to understand that man's union with Christ and God is a radical work of God alone, thus making it primarily and objective work. Man is given union with God, by the Spirit, through Christ's work. Christ does not come into man's soul, because He is the hidden goodness within man, or is brought to life through man's obedience. Neither is union with God reserved only for the pure who live in perfection. Sinners are united with God, through the righteousness of Christ, and baptism of the Spirit (Rom 3; Gal 3 & 4). Law was also muddled as to the goal of Christianity. The goal of Christianity is the glory and worship of God, which goal is worked out in the sinner's life by the Spirit *resulting* in human joy and happiness. The goal is not primarily perfection, spirituality, or even obedience. It is God himself, who will work holiness, spiritual communion, obedience in us through His Word and Spirit, in order that we grow in the understanding of His glory.

### Conclusion

The church today must be aware of mystical meditative spirituality. It is anthropocentric, and moralistic in its understanding of the atonement and justification by faith. Its doctrine of union with God is radically legalistic, obscuring the true doctrine of union with God. William Law was an ascetic, religious moralist, and a mystic who longed so hard after Christ, but could not see past himself and what he needed to perform. The church must not fall into this trap. She must uphold and long after piety, but that piety itself will cease to exist as soon as the church seeks it either outside the righteousness of Christ, or inside herself by moralism. The gospel is

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<sup>51</sup> Wood, 35.

the only way of true piety and oneness with God.

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Essay #2

The Life and Theology of William Law (1686-1761)

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