



GENIUS, GRIEF & GRACE

A Doctor Looks at Suffering & Success

DR. GAIUS DAVIES

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS





Extracts from The Poems of *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 4th edition, edited by W. H. Gardner and N.H. MacKenzie (OUP 1967), © The Society of Jesus 1967, are used by permission of Oxford University Press.

The extract from the *Weight of Glory* by C.S. Lewis copyright © C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd. 1949. Extract reprinted by permission.

Quotations from *Christina Rossetti: Selected Poems*, edited by C.H. Sissons (1984), are reproduced by arrangement with Carcanet Press Ltd.

Unless otherwise indicated, Bible quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.

© Gaius Davies

ISBN 978-1-84550-359-8

Expanded and extended edition, published in 2001,
reprinted 2003, 2008

by

Christian Focus Publications Ltd.,
Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire,
IV20 1TW, Scotland, UK
www.christianfocus.com

Cover design by Moose77.com

Printed and bound by Cromwell Press

This book was previously published as *Genius and Grace* in 1992 by Hodder and Stoughton/Hodder Headline plc, 338 Euston Road, London, NW1 3BH, England.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher, Christian Focus Publications





to
Rev. Emyr Roberts
and
Dr R. Geraint Gruffydd





Original Preface

It is never easy to be sure where a lifelong interest began. Perhaps my parents, by welcoming a number of unusual figures as visitors to our home, helped me most; I came to accept that gifted eccentrics, owing much to their experience of grace, were in no way unusual. David Bentley Taylor, in three lectures on Luther and Erasmus, enabled me to see that a medical student could find such men fascinating. The late Dr Douglas Johnson gave me books like *Nature and Grace* in 1947, and they influenced my reading about people such as John Bunyan and William Cowper. It was, for me, a special privilege that DJ, as that enthusiastic and learned man was known, read and criticized a good deal of this book as it took shape. For forty years and more, in second-hand bookshops, catalogues and libraries, I have been picking up books related to the theme of grace and personality. Now I can call it research.

I have had many teachers and colleagues in the psychiatric field who taught me much and helped me to apply the knowledge to people very much like the men and women studied in this book. As always seems to be the case, it was patients, rather than textbooks and journals, who taught me most.

I am grateful to many who have helped me by reading and making suggestions about the chapters, in part or whole. My family have borne the heaviest burden, and I thank my wife Nest for allowing each of the characters sketched in the book to share our bed and board for long periods. I thank my children Ruth, Carys (whose computer expertise made using a word-processor possible), Bethan and Jonathan for all their help. Dr J. I. Packer made many suggestions and read a number of chapters. Professor R. M. (Bobi) Jones applied his scholarly attention to the manuscript; to have a real live poet comment on other poets was, for me, a rare gift. Professor R. Geraint Gruffydd read many drafts, without complaint, and was a constant source of help and cautious encouragement; Geraint and his wife Luned were often consulted by telephone at critical points, but accepted the benign harass-





Genius, Grief and Grace

ment with grace. The Rev. A. P. Baker, our Reformed pastor, was a great help. Dr Oliver Briscoe was an invaluable friendly critic and support.

Other friends read parts of the book: Dorothy Allin, Ann Desmond, Andrew Ferguson, Eric Hamilton, Lily Jacobs, Major Clifford Kew, Robert Langley, Stuart Meyer, Iain Murray, Mary Nayler, Heather Nunnerly, Chris Olsen, Pauline Pitt, W. B. R. Saunders, Susannah Stanley, and Neil Yorkston. I am grateful to them and others (who made valuable suggestions) for help and encouragement.

The libraries of Bromley, the Institute of Psychiatry, and the University of London were most helpful. The Bethlem Royal and the Maudsley Hospitals' study leave committee were kind enough to grant me two weeks of study leave.

Ann and Edward England were especially helpful. I am grateful to Carolyn Armitage for all her editorial work from beginning to end, together with that of her colleagues.

I began to learn to write in 1959 when my editor, the late Rev. Emyr Roberts, persuaded me to do so. With him and Dr Geraint Gruffydd I served on the editorial board of *Y Cylchgrawn Efengylaidd* for ten years. They taught me much about writing to some purpose, in my own language and idiom. In those days Emyr had not won the Prose Medal, and Geraint had not sat in either of his two professional chairs, or been made National Librarian, or been elected Fellow of the British Academy. It is a pleasure to remember working with Emyr and Geraint, long before they attained their deserved distinctions, as two men who kept the faith and were faithful friends: to them the book is affectionately dedicated.





Preface

This book is mainly a reprint of *Genius and Grace*. I am grateful to all the reviewers who were kind enough to praise it when it first appeared. Those who wrote to tell me of the enjoyment and help they obtained from it were a great encouragement to me.

I am most grateful to Christian Focus and to Mr William Mackenzie and his staff, for agreeing to publish it in its new form. I thank Hodder for releasing, without charge, the manuscript they first published, and enabling me to give it to Christian Focus. I thank Errol Hulse, a reformed pastor and friend, for suggesting Christian Focus as a publisher.

Special thanks go to Professor James I. Packer for his help and his foreword: we have known each other since student days, when he first persuaded me in 1953 to speak at a Puritan Conference and then arranged for Professor F. F. Bruce to publish the paper that I gave. His ministry of encouragement and support is much appreciated. His suggestions about the new title for this book, and about adding chapters on Frances Ridley Havergal and Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones will, I trust, prove happy ones which will add to the book's interest and value.

The Rev. Dr John R.W. Stott was asked for a few words of recommendation, and wrote a foreword: I can only be grateful for his generous misunderstanding of the publisher's request. Since my first book on *Stress: the Challenge to Christian Caring* came about because of a lecture given to John Stott's project (with Miss Myra Chave Jones) called *Care and Counsel*, I hope his friendly and helpful words will help some to overcome their doubts about buying a book on suffering and success.

Two other friends are owed a debt of gratitude: Professor R. Geraint Gruffydd for his reading, suggestions and support and Dr E. Wyn James, Senior Lecturer at Cardiff University, for helping me with his detailed knowledge of material in the two new chapters.

My aim remains the same as I have expressed elsewhere in this book: to make a contribution to the stretching of our minds and the





Genius, Grief and Grace

enlarging of our hearts by helping to make sense of the suffering that good people have experienced and describing something of the joy that makes such suffering worthwhile.

Dr Gaius Davies





Foreword

This book is a celebration of grace, of God's grace which transforms even those who suffer painful handicaps and disabilities.

Dr Gaius Davies introduces us to eleven distinguished – even heroic – Christian people: Luther in the sixteenth century, Bunyan in the seventeenth, William Cowper in the eighteenth, Lord Shaftesbury, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Christina Rossetti and Frances Ridley Havergal in the nineteenth, and Amy Carmichael, J. B. Phillips, C. S. Lewis and Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in the twentieth. In each case he begins by giving us a brief but fascinating biographical sketch, including a careful analysis of his of her particular trial, and then indicates how grace operated in each. For each could be described as a triumph of grace.

Having had twenty-five years clinical experience as a Consultant Psychiatrist, Gaius Davies is well qualified to investigate the frailties of the people he writes about. His purpose is emphatically not to debunk them, however, but rather the reverse, namely to show how divine grace transformed their human weakness. His particular focus is on their 'obsessive-compulsive disorders', including anxiety, depression, guilt, darkness and doubt. In doing so, he displays the integrity of the Bible, which does not conceal the foibles and failures of its great characters, and goes on to describe God's gracious dealings with them.

Fundamental to Gaius Davies' thesis are two convictions about the operation of God's grace.

First, 'grace does not change us as personalities'. To be sure, we are 'a new creation' (2 Cor. 5:17). Grace changes our outlook, ambitions, motives and behaviour, but not our inherited temperament. If, therefore, before experiencing the new birth, we were extroverts, we will be extroverts afterwards, but we will be easier to live with! If, on the other hand, we were introverts before, we will still be the same, but we will find it easier to live with ourselves!

Secondly, grace does not render us immune to either physical or mental illness. Nor does God promise healing in every case.





Genius, Grief and Grace

There is a tendency in some Christian circles to declare it inappropriate for Christians ever to fall sick. ‘You have no business to suffer from depression’, some say. But no. Although God can and does heal, and indeed all healing is divine healing, he often leaves us to struggle with disability and to bear pain. For example, the deprivation of parental love during childhood may result in permanent psychological damage.

What I specially admire about Gaius Davies’ book is his honesty and realism. He offers no glib remedies. He tells us the truth, that some of God’s heroes and heroines have been eccentric and neurotic, and have suffered repeated breakdowns. He is well read and his book is well written. Its message in the end is Christ’s word to Paul: ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Cor. 12:9).

John Stott





To the reader

I am delighted that this book is being reprinted. It has been one of my favourites since it first appeared.

Why does it please me so? For six reasons at least.

First, Dr Davies can write, and, like you, I enjoy what is well-written.

Second, he writes knowledgeably about some fascinating individuals – gifted, troubled Christians, whom he brings brilliantly to life. Such people always grab my interest, and I think these particular ones will grab yours.

Third, his focus is on their griefs and pains, their struggles and their sufferings: how they faced temptations that temperament within as well as circumstances without had sharpened, and how they gave themselves to serving and honouring God despite their own felt weaknesses. From inside stories of this kind flow the truest benefit of Christian biography, and these testimonies to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (for that really is what they all are) are narrated with outstanding insight into the things that make Christian people tick.

Fourth, Gaius Davies is a psychiatrist with a particular concern for believers whose minds, for whatever reason, are working less than well. With specialist expertise he diagnoses his subjects clinically and pinpoints pastorally the roots as well as the fruits of the out-of-shapeness that he sees in them. He knows about depression, bipolar mood swings, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and the destructive pitfalls of perfectionism, and puts his knowledge to good use in profiling these lovers of the Lord. Thus he gives us a three-dimensional understanding of their humanness in a way that hagiography cannot do, and that big biographies of his chosen characters often fail to do. I greatly value this feature of what he has put together.

Fifth, Davies appreciates poetry as the concentrated verbalizing of personal vision, and so as a profound revelation of its writers as well as of what they are looking at and thinking about. Whether narrative, descriptive, or meditative in form, poems are always a





Genius, Grief and Grace

personal ‘take’ on something, communicating not just from head to head but from heart to heart. Davies’ profilings of Hopkins and Rosetti in particular are illuminating just because he discerns so clearly how poems express and enrich life, for Christians no less than for unbelievers.

Sixth, Davies’ authoritative exploration of his subjects’ psychological makeup (a road less travelled in Christian biography) yields an enhanced sense of their stature – their integrity, bravery, and as we say sheer guts, in coping with calamity while cleaving to Christ. Rubbing shoulders with them, as I meet them here, becomes a source of strength under God for my own life.

So I commend this book with enthusiasm, and wish it a readership worthy of its wisdom.

J. I. Packer





Introduction

Sweet are the uses of adversity

This is a book about suffering and success; about how adversity may lead to achievement. In one way it is about how to be a successful failure. Each person described in it was, in some way, gifted to the point of genius. Each person described had crucial experiences of grace. Their faith became the most important factor in their lives. None of them was exempt from a share of distress; but it seems to have *driven* them to serve, rather than been a hindrance. Their service has often been of a most distinguished kind.

Winston Churchill used to speak of his 'black dog': he survived though he was dogged by depression for much of his life. It is said that only because Churchill had faced his own black periods was he able, at sixty years of age, to rally those who felt overwhelmed by the Nazi threat. His own experience of adversity enabled him to be a leader who helped to save the world from the darkness of tyranny.

Many heroes, men and women of genius who achieved so much, did what they did in spite of much suffering: many have said that their special trials and troubles *enabled* them to succeed in the way they did. We may find it upsetting that such heroic figures were flawed. We may be willing to admit privately that our leading characters have feet of clay. It is another thing for it to be made public, discussed freely, and for the larger-than-life figures thus, somehow, to be diminished.

It was the great hero Achilles who had his vulnerable heel: that, it will be recalled, was blamed on his mother, since she held him by the heel while dipping him as an infant in the magical waters.

In the Jewish and Christian tradition one of the great archetypal figures is that of Jacob. His very name means one who supplants or undermines; a twister. Yet Jacob became Israel: a name meaning a prince with God. He was permanently affected with a limp after his thigh was touched in his encounter one night, as he wrestled with the angel of the Lord. It is a short step to suspecting that perhaps, every heroic figure has his hidden weaknesses with which he has to struggle.





Genius, Grief and Grace

The burning questions for Christians are: How did such heroic figures overcome their weaknesses, and what role did their faith, God's grace and the power of his Spirit play in their achievement?

Heroes who suffered

I have selected a number of people who are, to me and many others, heroic figures. In writing about them I have worn two hats: that of a doctor who has specialized in psychological medicine for the last twenty-five years, and that of a Christian believer.

All the heroes are from the Christian tradition, even when their influence extends well beyond that tradition. I respond to them first with my heart and my affections: I grew to love them. It has been my experience that my faith and understanding are enriched by contact with people like Bunyan, Luther, Amy Carmichael and C. S. Lewis.

Just as early Christians in the period of the New Testament looked back on a cloud of witnesses, so can we. To do so is full of interest and offers much we can learn and enjoy. I have relished trying to share my admiration and love for these figures whose temperament and lives I have sketched.

Wearing my other hat, as a consultant psychiatrist I am curious to know what sort of people they were. What made them tick? I am drawn to some, like William Cowper, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Lord Shaftesbury and Christina Rossetti, because I know they suffered from much anxiety and depression.

It is a pity that some maverick psychiatrists and psychologists have been seen as enemies of both genius in general, and of those who are Christian or religious in particular. It is only too easy to try to explain away the towering achievements of great men and women. To do this is almost always misguided. It often reflects more on those who try to do it than on those whose work they attack.

What a psychiatrist has to offer, in my view, is not to reduce things to illness, or sexual frustration or whatever is currently in vogue, but rather to propose ways of understanding and obtaining insight. By this I mean learning as much as we can about how people's personalities are formed, and how they function in





Introduction

God's purpose. Where there is suffering, illness or distress, I hope to bring the best of modern knowledge to bear in the process of teasing out the many strands in their problems, while trying to avoid speculation.

When I see modern Christians, coming reluctantly for help with their problems, I feel like comforting them by saying that some of our illustrious forebears suffered just like them. They were men and women of like passions as we are. They were not afraid to admit it, nor were they ashamed of being anxious or depressed.

Grace and personality

I must confess to another motive that led to my study of these heroes: a great curiosity about the relation between personality and the way God's grace works in the heart. The subject is mysterious, and yet the results of the interaction between grace and personality form the subject matter of much Christian biography and, indeed, of most religious experience.

The question of how temperament and faith are connected is, of course, brought to the fore in every conversion experience. We cannot understand Methodism without knowing something of how John and Charles Wesley found faith and assurance in 1738. Both found Martin Luther a great catalyst: John through Luther's work on Romans, Charles through Luther's Commentary on St Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Every Christian who seeks to find faith and to grow in grace is bound to wonder how the whole process works. We may consider one example in the form of a question: Does every believer, in the process of repentance and faith, have to go through his or her own Slough of Despond as described in Pilgrim's Progress? Is John Bunyan right in making so much of conviction of sin? I believe it was necessary for him, because he was a special case. Unique examples can teach us general principles, yet not every Christian has to be introduced to the faith in as harsh and difficult a way as Bunyan.

Saving grace and common grace

Grace means different things, depending on the context. I take it to mean the unmerited favour God shows to men and women in





Genius, Grief and Grace

Christ. It includes his mercy and his love shown in the great acts of redemption which make forgiveness and new life possible.

In these sketches I try to consider how this saving grace, mediated by God's Spirit, works in the hearts of men and women. The differing backgrounds against which salvation came to the figures sketched here are the result of what is sometimes called *common grace*, part of the ecology of grace. This aspect of grace is not to do with salvation: it is part of God's general goodness and kindness to undeserving men. I believe it is what is referred to in the Gospels as the rain that falls on the just and unjust. It was wittily described by Lord Bowen:

The rain it raineth on the just
And on the unjust fella;
But more upon the just because
The unjust stole the just's umbrella.

Those lines touch upon the problem many feel about the unfairness of God's goodness: why should the wicked flourish as the green bay tree? The grace which restrains corruption by blessing us with law, education, medicine and the arts is a part of God's goodness: it deserves our praise and thanks.

I see the 'natural' gifts of many of my heroes as part of God's common grace in action. These gifts, too, come down from the Father of lights. They formed and made their special characters, making them fit vessels for their Master to use in his work.

Reflecting and refracting God's grace

I have found it helpful to think of saving grace as light, and the human personality as a prism through which it shines and is diffracted into all the colours of the spectrum.

We are accustomed to thinking of mirrors, since both the apostles Paul and James encourage us to do so. God's word is spoken of as a mirror in which we may see ourselves in the light of the law, and go and act by it, not forgetting what we have seen. More daring is the image of St Paul: 'We all reflect as in a mirror the splendour of the Lord; thus we are transfigured into his likeness, from splendour to splendour; such is the influence of the Lord





Introduction

who is Spirit' (2 Cor. 3:18, NEB). It is a bold figure of speech, to explain part of the way grace works in us.

Grace is described using many images, and light is surely one of the best. It is used from beginning to end in the Bible, starting with the primeval 'Let there be light' and ending with the final scene in the holy city where the glory of God is its light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

When the light of God's grace shines in a human heart, the way it is diffracted is surely related to the personality in whom that grace is at work. When a prism breaks light down into its constituent parts it shows a rainbow-spread of all the colours: a spectrum of promise. It illustrates the manifold grace of God. In some lives *faith* is the outstanding part of the spectrum of grace that we see: Martin Luther is such a person, for whom it was always *Sola fide*, by faith alone. For Amy Carmichael *love* was the most important thing: she emphasised Calvary love, surely quite rightly.

Shaftesbury might have said that for him *faith working through love* was the hallmark of grace, or at least of grace in action. For Gerard Manley Hopkins the emphasis was on *praise* and seeing God's *glory*.

It will be my intention to try to show that even the flaws in the prism of personality may demonstrate, in a special way, aspects of God's grace. For grace is made perfect in weakness, and its treasure is in earthen vessels which are frequently flawed and cracked. We all know examples of broken earthenware, and may sometimes feel we are examples of this ourselves.

The temperaments

In writing these biographical sketches to illustrate how grace works in our lives, I have tried to establish the facts, and to be cautious with explanations. I have taken the best historians I can find as my guides, and where possible I have used the words of those who have written their own accounts in diaries, letters and journals.

I have tried not to speculate, but to tell it as it was. Everyone, however, has a hidden model of personality and temperament. My problem was: which should I choose?

I was tempted to follow Professor Ole Hallesby, the well-known Lutheran writer from Norway. In his book, on *Temperament and*





Genius, Grief and Grace

the Christian Faith, he uses Galen's ancient model based on the four humours: the sanguine, the melancholic, the choleric and the phlegmatic.

It is fascinating to observe his method: the apostle Peter is *sanguine*: warm, buoyant and lively. John is the apostle chosen as *melancholic*: dark, gloomy, full of feeling and suffering. Paul is the apostle he chooses to show the *choleric*: hot, quick and active. Hallesby offers no example of the *phlegmatic* person: slow, cool and sober. The phlegmatic folk, with the melancholic, are seen as the solid nucleus of the living Church.

Hallesby's method is to describe the strengths and weaknesses of each temperament, and the problems that each offers in counselling. To his great credit he does not want Christians to deny their temperament and lose all real, individual character. Instead, an individual's temperament should be disciplined, modified and sanctified – but still remain his own.

My decision to abandon the four temperaments was inevitable. The shades of Jung and the way Professor Hans Eysenck had made Jung's views applicable in a scientific way were good reasons for abandoning the four humours. *Extraversion* and *introversion*, with their variants, are much more easily understood. And yet no theory of personality does justice to the complexity of each individual character.

'Speak of me as I am'

I have settled for trying to describe the distinguishing traits of personality in my heroes and heroines. To be a slave to any system would be to do violence to their temperaments, to force them to fit a Procrustean bed or a fancy framework. I certainly do not wish to put anyone into a psychiatric strait jacket. I have therefore adopted Othello's suggestion:

Speak of me as I am, nothing extenuate
Nor set out aught in malice.

Sometimes an *obsessional* trait stands out, as in the scrupulous perfectionism of Luther or Bunyan in early life. Sometimes a *paranoid* tendency to see enemies (as Shaftesbury saw them, often without reason), emerges under stress. In others the his-





Introduction

trionic traits, a tendency, like old-fashioned *hysterics*, to make a drama out of a crisis, is very evident. Sometimes there is much *psychosomatic illness*. The *depressive* tendency, the melancholy in William Cowper, can be dissected carefully and understood in terms of his early experiences and the life events that preceded his attacks.

What of the 'fruits' of suffering? 'Sweet are the uses of adversity,' says the Duke in *As You Like It*. 'It was good for me that I was afflicted,' says Cowper, quoting Psalm 119. The Christian statement of it was made at different times by the apostle Paul: 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.' Our Lord had promised: 'In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.'

The waters of Marah were bitter after the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea and started the long desert trek. Moses was shown a piece of wood which, after he had thrown it into the water, made it sweet. Such has been the experience of many Christians, notably those I have, almost at random, chosen to sketch in these pages. Many others, who kept few diaries and may have been less distinguished than those described here, might well add their testimonies.

The experiences of those I have chosen may, I hope, be a source of comfort and encouragement, quite apart from their intrinsic interest and importance in our Christian heritage. Their experience, in some respects, was well described by George Herbert in his poem 'Bitter-sweet':

Ah my deare angrie Lord,
Since thou dost love, yet strike;
Cast down, yet help afford;
Sure I will do the like.
I will complain, yet praise;
I will bewail, approve:
And all my sowresweet dayes
I will lament, and love.

I also write to counteract the tendency to paint a picture simply of peace and joy in believing; for there can be painful suffering as well as all the pleasures.





Genius, Grief and Grace

The transforming power of grace

The transforming power of grace works at different levels. Luther and Bunyan emphasized how remarkably grace changes our *status*. They reflect the New Testament teaching that we are moved from the dominion of darkness to that of light, to the kingdom of the Son. This basic change has many consequences. We become, in a special way, children by adoption and grace. And as children we become heirs. One of my many reasons for writing is to remind myself, and anyone willing to read on, that our forebears entered into this inheritance on earth while we sometimes live like paupers. The riches of grace can be ours as they were to these heroes of faith.

Grace does not change us as personalities. The bodies, intelligence and natural aptitudes remain the same. Grace does not change temperament. The new life, the new creation, expresses itself through the same old personalities. Some readers may find this a harsh and a wrong judgement, as if I were attempting to make light of the wonder of all things being new when a person is 'in Christ'. But for Amy Carmichael and Christina Rossetti being 'in Christ', union with him by faith, was an important part of how grace transformed them.

How, then, do the changes produced by grace happen? Lifestyles may be completely different, because *behaviour* is changed. Some things are dropped immediately because they are not appropriate for Christians. Other forms of behaviour, more ingrained in the past pattern, may take longer to change. To establish new patterns of living we all need examples to follow, now so often called role-models. Our role-model is Christ, and being conformed to Christ means we are in all things to grow up into him (Eph. 4:15; 5:1; Col. 2:6).

This implies a learning process, something which, to me, stands out throughout the New Testament, as it does in the lives of our heroes. Many Christian heroes can say, as the apostle Paul said: 'You became imitators of us and of the Lord, in spite of severe suffering' (1 Thess. 1:6). Imitative learning has an honourable place in Christian history.

Attitudes and motives change. It has often been noted that some people *appear* to get more intelligent after they become Christians.





Introduction

They seem to read more difficult books, because they have a new reason for using their minds. For many different reasons great periods of religious revival are marked by a return to reading basic texts which explain and apply the Bible to our lives. A simple way of describing this is that when we have come to know the Author we wish to read his books and learn more about him. The new life is to do with knowing and loving Christ: wanting to know more of the one we love is a powerful motivator. Our faith, too, needs to grow by knowing more: we exercise newly discovered mental muscles. The faith and love lead to obedience: to wanting to live better lives, more like Christ's own obedience to his Father.

Yet if I am good with words but not with numbers, it is unlikely that grace will turn me into a computer buff. If I can use my head but am clumsy with my hands, I may want to be a carpenter but may find it harder to knock in a nail correctly than to read about the design of chairs.

Traits, easily measured by psychologists, are aptitudes which are part of what we inherit and develop because of our genetic potential. Our faith in Christ, and his grace working in us, enables us to use them in new ways. But to try to change our basic personalities, rather than accepting them as part of what we are given, seems to me to lead to endless problems. It is to look for magic, not the miraculous changes that grace brings. It is like looking for spiritual cosmetic surgery, or a brain transplant.

When we are filled with God's Spirit, are we not filled to the capacity that we have been given? The gifts of the Spirit may likewise function within the limits of the natural capacity with which God has endowed us, and he is the Father who knows our frame and remembers that we are but dust. But, of course, exceptional feats may follow such filling with the Spirit. In this area I apply the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 12:3: 'Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.'

All things become new, certainly. But they are perceived using the old eyes, the old mind: and therefore the eyes have constantly to be opened to see new things out of God's law; and the mind has constantly to be renewed.





Genius, Grief and Grace

More than conquerors

While making much of the transforming power of grace, we may also appreciate the human achievement involved. And yet, overcoming the problems posed by our personalities might lead to a pride that is not warranted; that is why the Christian wants to give God the glory. One of Lord Shaftesbury's favourite phrases in his diary was *Non nobis, Domine*, 'Not unto us, O Lord.' He was keen to ascribe all praise to God, as in the famous Reformation watchword *Soli Deo Gloria*.

We wish to magnify God's grace, but we may also observe that some work out their salvation in better ways than others. This is not to advocate an elitism of the select few, but to recognize that in the Gospels and the letters of the New Testament we are made responsible for building on rock not sand, on Christ as the one foundation. We are urged to be careful of how we build, as in the passage which speaks of choosing gold, silver and precious stones to build with, rather than using wood, hay and stubble (1 Cor. 3:12-13).

Thus grace in Christ lays the only foundation, and *enabling* grace allows us to choose how we may build upon it. God graciously gives the talents, one, five or ten, and we are responsible for how we trade with them; how we use our gifts is a matter for audit, both as we go along our pilgrim way and also in a final audit: 'the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each [person's] work.'

Genius is said to be an infinite capacity for taking pains. What makes the heroes of faith endearing to me is this painstaking, persevering quality of their work and daily lives. It may be considered a failing in them that they were, in some sense, workaholics. Not one seems to have been famous for *play* as opposed to work; leisure did not seem to be very attractive to them. Their lives were full, and a change of occupation seems to have been therapeutic to them. They found a change was as good as a rest, often enough.

They shared with Henry Martyn a fear of trifling, and a wish to be in earnest. Martyn, the young scholar-missionary who worked in India and Persia, died young, having wished to 'burn out for God'. In that same earnest spirit the heroes and heroines here





Introduction

studied tackled their personality problems, accepted or fought their symptoms and illnesses, and triumphed over them in many ways. Amy Carmichael gave Old Testament names to her different pains, and felt it was then easier to fight and to bear them, with wit and humour as well as patience.

Those for whom scrupulous obsessionality might have become a lifelong crippling disorder (as it so often is), seem to have learned to conquer much of it by putting their obsessional anxieties to use, as if it were the water that could drive a mill-wheel. Even depressive thoughts and symptoms could often be utilized, as William Cowper found to his own enrichment, and ours.

But those who are more than conquerors do not have to be perfect: they fall, but are not utterly cast down. They have their scars in front, and are not injured while running away from the fight. That is why Amy Carmichael's poem 'Hast Thou no Scar?' is so profoundly moving. Perhaps it is all a reflection on the greatness of persevering grace, as much as on prevenient grace – the love that God shows in going before us, preparing the way and enabling us to be patient to the very end. Gerard Manley Hopkins, in his darkest moments, is able to express some of these facts magnificently.

At times, in the phrase that C. S. Lewis used to Sheldon Vanauken when his young wife was dying in Oxford, it is a *severe mercy*. Under that mercy any part of our lives may be transfigured, even when we have to march on using the same old body, the same temperament, and fighting the same old nature which militates against our new life in Christ. Not all the heroes and heroines lived to old age; some, like Hopkins, succumbed to typhoid fever in their forties. Yet each one would have joined in the words of Philip Doddridge about his own life:

His work my hoary age shall bless
When youthful vigour is no more;
And my last hour of life confess
His love has animating power.

The threefold cord

I would like to think that it is the animating power of love which is the main strand which runs through the lives of the characters





Genius, Grief and Grace

I have sketched. It is seen most clearly in their personal and private lives, but it motivates their public careers too. If it is true that a cord of three strands is not easily broken, it seems to me that their faith in Christ and the hope that he inspires are the other two strands in the gold cord that we may trace.

At their best, these heroes of the faith remind us to ‘fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame’ (Heb. 12:2). They all, in their different ways, admitted that they were pilgrims and strangers, soldiers in an alien land. But they also knew something of the joy set before them: it is a joy of which all Christians, of whatever persuasion, may have that occasional foretaste which makes some sense of their sufferings, and makes their work worthwhile.

Further Reading

Anthony Storr, *Churchill's Black Dog* (London: Collins, 1989); O. Hallesby, *Temperament and the Christian Faith* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1962); J. Rapaport, *The Boy Who Couldn't Stop Washing* (London: Collins, 1990); William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (originally published 1902, republished Hamondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985).

