



*The Life of God
in the Soul of Man*

by
Henry Scougal



*to which is added
Rules and Instructions for a Holy Life*

by
Robert Leighton

CHRISTIAN HERITAGE





Introduction © J I Packer



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Introduction



‘I never knew what true religion was till God sent me this excellent treatise,’ wrote George Whitefield.

When a man of Whitefield’s stature applauds a book in such terms, it is our wisdom to sit up and take notice. For who was Whitefield? The ‘Grand Itinerant’, as his contemporaries called him, was, more than anyone else, the trail-blazing pioneer and personal embodiment of the eighteenth-century revival of vital Christianity in the West, the revival that shaped English-speaking society on both sides of the Atlantic for over a hundred years and that fathered the evangelical missionary movement which for the past two centuries has been taking the gospel literally round the world.

That epoch-making revival threw up many outstanding leaders, but head and shoulders above the rest were four giants, landmark figures not just for their own lifetime but for all later ages too: John Wesley, supreme as organizer, educator, pastoral leader, publicist and apologist; Charles Wesley, his younger

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brother, sublimest poet of Christian experience; Jonathan Edwards, America's greatest theologian; and with them, indeed in one sense ahead of them all, Whitefield, who for a generation till his death in 1770 was acknowledged as the focal figure of the entire movement. First to preach the transforming message of the new birth, first to take it into the open air and declare the world his parish, first to publish journals celebrating God's work in and through him, and first to set up societies for the nurturing of those who came to faith under his ministry, Whitefield proclaimed Christ tirelessly throughout Britain and colonial America, drawing huge crowds, winning thousands of souls, impacting myriads more, and gaining celebrity status of a kind matched only by Billy Graham and John Paul II today. Wesley's influence as a renewer of popular religion is sometimes credited with saving England from an upheaval like the French revolution; if there is substance in such reasoning, Whitefield should receive greater credit, for his ministry ranged wider and his pulpit power was greater. We live at a time when uncertainty as to what constitutes true religion is more widespread, perhaps, than at any time since Christianity was born; we shall do well to recognize that the little old book that cleared Whitefield's mind on this basic matter might have something to say to us too.





Henry Scougal's exposition of 'true religion' (his phrase, echoed by Whitefield, meaning genuine Christianity) was from one standpoint the seed out of which the English side of the revival first sprouted; for the book was favourite reading in Oxford's Holy Club, where the Wesleys and Whitefield first came together. For half a century religious societies, as they were called, had been set up in various places to supplement the parish church's Sunday ministry by midweek gatherings for prayer, discussion, and the reading of works of devotion ('good books'). The society lampooned as the Holy Club was run by John Wesley in his capacity as an ordained priest and Fellow of Lincoln College. It was distinctive only for being in Oxford, where such a thing had not, it seems, been seen before, and for the ascetic intensity with which its dozen or so members pursued the goal of true religion. Whitefield, a tall, good-looking, well-spoken freshman from Gloucester, a servitor at Pembroke College – one, that is, who performed menial duties to finance his education – admired the Holy Club from afar, and wanted to join. Charles Wesley, himself a member, took a liking to Whitefield and gave him Scougal, which he eagerly devoured. An agonizing quest, evidently Scougal-sparked, for the life of God in his own soul then led to the dawning of an assured certainty that through the grace of Je-





sus Christ he was ‘ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven’ and truly born again.

I once heard a Christian testify, ‘I knew I was converted when religion stopped being a duty and became a delight,’ and that is something Whitefield could have said, for that was precisely what he felt. Once ordained, he preached the new birth as the door of entry into true religion as Scougal described it, and the English revival began. Without Scougal it might not have happened.

What precisely was it that Whitefield learned from Scougal? In a word, it was the inwardness and supernaturalness of biblical godliness. Not that Scougal’s testimony here was in any way unique. During the century that followed the Reformation conflicts, English Puritans like Perkins, Owen and Baxter, Anglicans of the ‘holy living’ school like Jeremy Taylor, Lutheran pietists like Johannes Arndt, and Roman Catholic teachers like Ignatius Loyala, Francis de Sales, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, had all centred attention on the realities of the Christian’s inner life, to such an extent that scholars can nowadays speak of the seventeenth-century devotional revival. In this study the Reformation debates about church, sacraments, justification and authority largely receded into the background; communion with the Father and the Son through the Spirit, lived out in the disciplined practice of patient





love and humble obedience, was the common theme, and Scougal, a devoted soul himself, was able to draw on a rich legacy of fairly homogeneous thought about ‘the life of God in the soul of man’. This helps to explain the extraordinary authority, maturity, and sureness of touch with which at the age of 26 he was able to analyze the reality of spiritual life. Granted, he was brilliant and precocious (he served as Professor of Philosophy in Aberdeen University for four years, from the age of 19); granted, he was the son of a bishop, and a godly one, and had had every spiritual advantage in his upbringing plus, as it seems, a heart responsive to God from his earliest days; but even so, he could hardly have produced this little classic – for such it is – without the distilled wisdom of the seventeenth century behind him.

‘Christians,’ declares Scougal, ‘know by experience that true religion is a union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul, or, in the apostle’s phrase, “it is Christ formed within us”.’ It is ‘life’, the life of God within, in the sense of being spontaneous energy actively responding to the grace of God set forth in the gospel. Scougal calls it ‘an inward, free and self-moving principle ... a new nature instructing and prompting’. Love, purity and humility are the three fundamental virtues in which this life takes form, and all three are blos-





somings of faith. 'Faith (is) ... a kind of sense, or feeling persuasion of spiritual things; it extends itself unto all divine truths; but in our lapsed estate, it hath a peculiar relation to the declarations of God's mercy and reconcilableness to sinners through a mediator; and therefore ... is ordinarily termed "faith in Jesus Christ".' The virtues themselves are to be conceived in a way that sees acts as the outworking of attitudes and attitudes as the expression of motives; so Scougal defines them as follows.

Love, basically, is love of God: 'a delightful and affectionate sense of the divine perfections, which makes the soul resign and sacrifice itself wholly unto him, desiring above all things to please him, and delighting in nothing so much as in fellowship and communion with him, and being ready to do or suffer anything for his sake, or at his pleasure ... A soul thus possessed with divine love must needs be enlarged towards all mankind ... this is ... charity ... under which all parts of justice, all the duties we owe to our neighbour, are eminently comprehended; for he who doth truly love all the world ... so far from wronging or injuring any person ... will resent any evil that befalls others, as if it happened to himself.'

Purity is 'a due abstractedness from the body and mastery over the inferior appetites ... such a temper and disposition of mind as makes a man despise and abstain from all pleasures



and delights of sense or fancy which are sinful in themselves, or tend to ... lessen our relish of more divine and intellectual (he means, God-centred and rational) pleasures, which doth also infer a resoluteness to undergo all those hardships he may meet with in the performance of his duty: so that not only chastity and temperance, but also Christian courage and magnanimity may come under this head.'

And humility means 'a deep sense of our own meanness, with a hearty and affectionate acknowledgment of our owing all that we are to the divine bounty; which is always accompanied with a profound submission to the will of God, and great deadness to the glory of the world, and the applause of men.'

'These qualities,' says Scougal, 'are the very foundation of heaven laid in the soul,' just as they are the basic elements of genuine Christ-likeness here and now. The rest of his book is a celebration of these qualities, with encouragement to develop habits of repentance and discipline in using the means of grace (thought, prayer, and the Lord's Supper) so as to engender all three ever more radically and robustly in one's personal life.

Scougal never loses sight of the inwardness of true religion, as a state of being that starts in our hearts, nor of the fact that it is a supernatural product, 'having God for its author, and being wrought in the souls of men by the power of the



Holy Spirit'; so we do not find him slipping into the self-reliant, performance-oriented, surface-level, ego-focussed, living-by-numbers type of instruction that is all too common among Christians today. He knows that personal change will not occur without use of means, just as he knows that no use of means will change the heart without God's blessing, and he marks out the path of change with admirable balance.

One could wish, however, that his exposition had been more explicitly and emphatically Christ-centred. Like so many seventeenth-century writers, he lets himself assume that his readers know all about Jesus and need only to be told about real religion, the life of faith and faith-full turning Godward as opposed to the orthodoxism, formalism, emotionalism and legalism that masquerade as Christianity while being in truth a denial of it. Had Scougal elaborated on the Christian's union with Christ, which the New Testament sees as regeneration by the Holy Spirit; had he explained incorporation into the Saviour's risen life, whereby Jesus's motivating passion to know and love and serve and please and honour and glorify the Father is implanted in sinners so that it is henceforth their own deepest desire too; had he thus shown, in black and white, that imitating Jesus's aims and attitudes in serving God and mankind is for the born-again the most natural, indeed the only natural, way of living, while





for the unregenerate it is hard to the point of impossible; his little treatise would have been immeasurably stronger. As it is, Scougal's profile of divine life in human souls is much more complete than his answer to the question, how do I get into it? – or, how does it get into me? This is a limitation.

To be sure, there are real strengths in Scougal's account of the means of grace for the changing of the heart, particularly when he directs us to meditation – sustained thought, that is – on the 'vanity and emptiness of worldly enjoyments', the truth of Christianity, and the redeeming love of God as shown in the saving ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is strong too when he urges us to form habits of behaving as if our hearts were changed even though as yet they are not. This is more than 'fake it till you make it'; Scougal is telling us to give God proof that we are serious and sincere in seeking inward renewal, for he knows that evidence of sincerity is something God regularly requires as a condition of answering our prayers. With these emphases, however, should be linked specific directions on looking to and coming to the living Christ himself, believing on him, trusting in him, and waiting for him till we know that we are his and he is ours – the sort of directions that Whitefield himself was later to give during the last half-hour of many thousands of evangelistic messages. Scougal's omission here, which





leaves the impression that godliness blossoms in us as a kind of natural growth, is certainly a shortcoming.

It will be appropriate as we close to cite more fully Whitefield's witness to what Scougal gave him. This comes from a sermon preached in the last year of his life, taken down as he spoke and not corrected.

‘When I was sixteen years of age, I began to fast twice a week for thirty-six hours together, prayed many times a day, received the sacrament every Lord's day, fasting myself almost to death all the forty days of Lent, during which I made it a point of duty never to go less than three times a day to public worship, besides seven times a day to my private prayers, yet I knew no more that I was to be born again in God, born a new creature in Christ Jesus, than if I were never born at all ... I must bear testimony to my old friend Mr Charles Wesley; he put a book into my hands, called *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, whereby God showed me, that I must be born again, or be damned.

I know the place: it may be superstitious, perhaps, but whenever I go to Oxford, I cannot help running to that place where Jesus Christ first revealed himself to me, and gave me the new birth ... How did my heart rise, how did my heart shudder, like a poor man that is afraid to look into his account-books, lest he should find himself a bankrupt; yet shall I burn that book, shall I throw it down, shall I put it by, or shall I search into it? I did, and holding the book in my hand,



thus addressed the God of heaven and earth: Lord, if I am not a Christian, if I am not a real one, God, for Jesus Christ's sake, show me what Christianity is, that I may not be damned at last. I read a little further ... O, says the author, they that know anything of religion, know it is a vital union with the Son of God, Christ formed in the heart; O what a ray of divine life did then break in upon my poor soul ... from that moment God has been carrying on his blessed work in my soul: and as I am now fifty-five years of age ... I tell you, my brethren ... I am more and more convinced that this is the truth of God, and without it you never can be saved by Jesus Christ ...'



Thus God used Scougal to awaken the man who himself came later to be known as the Awakener. And all that remains to be said is that some today, who would call themselves Christians if asked, clearly stand in need of a similar awakening: which Scougal, under God, may bring them, if only they will read his smooth late-seventeenth-century rhetoric thoughtfully and let it speak to them. Real Christians will gain from Scougal a healthy reminder that heart-change and character-change thence resulting is what their faith is all about, and the self-deceived will be forced to face the fact that those who have not yet been so changed are not yet Christians at all. Scougal's word to them will thus have been preparation for the humble hearing of the gospel invitation, which many today will fail to hear because they are unaware that they need





to hear it, and which Whitefield, near the time when he uttered the testimony quoted above, verbalized as follows:

‘Sinners in Zion, baptised heathens, professors but not possessors, formalist, believing unbelievers, talking of Christ, talking of grace, orthodox in your creeds, but heterodox in your lives, turn ye, turn ye, Lord help you to turn to him, turn ye to Jesus Christ, and may God turn you inside out ... may that glorious Father that raised Christ from the dead, raise your dead souls! ... Bless the Lord that Jesus stands with pitying eyes, and outstretched arms, to receive you now. Will you go with the man? Will you accept of Christ? Will you begin to live now? May God say, Amen; may God pass by, not in anger, but in love ... and say to you dead sinners, come forth, live a life of faith on earth, live a life of vision in heaven; even so, Lord Jesus: *Amen.*’



J. I. Packer





Preface



This age groans under such a surcharge of new books, that, though the many good ones lately published do much balance the great swarms of ill, or at least needless ones; yet all men complain of the unnecessary charge and trouble many new books put them to: the truth of it is, printing is become a trade, and the presses must be kept going, so that, if it were but to shuffle out an ill book, a man may be tempted to keep them at work.

And for books of devotion and piety we have seen so many excellent ones of late in our own language, that perhaps no age or language can show the like: in these the Christian religion is proposed in its own true and natural colours, and rescued from those false representations many are apt to make of it; as if it consisted either in external performances, or in mechanical hearts to the fancy, or in embracing some opinions or interests. 'It is, and can be nothing else, but a design to make us like God, both in the inward temper of our minds, and in our whole deportment and conversation.' For this

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end did Christ both live and die; this he taught by discourses, and discovered in his life. He died, that he might take away sin, and not only, or chiefly to procure our pardon, which was done by him for a further end, than an universal indemnity being offered through his death, all mankind might be thereby encouraged to enter into a course of holy obedience with all possible advantages, having the hopes of endless happiness, and the fears of eternal miseries before them; having the clearest rule, and the most unblemished example proposed to them; being also sure of constant inward supplies, to support and strengthen their endeavours, and an unerring providence to direct all things that concern them.



Nor are there any precepts in this whole doctrine, whose fitness and true excellency, besides the authority of the Law-giver, has not been fully made good: and the truth of the principles of natural religion, and of the revelation of the counsel of God in Scripture, was never, since miracles ceased, demonstrated with fuller and clearer evidence than in our age; both for stopping the mouths of all daring Hectors, and for silencing the secret doubtings of more inquisitive minds. And though so grave a subject should have been rather prejudiced than adorned by artificial and forced strains of wit and eloquence; yet as our language was never chaster than now, so these subjects have been





handled with all the proper decencies of easy wit and good language.

But, after all this, into what a torrent of grief and lamentation must we break out, when we consider the age we live in! for few, do either believe or reflect on those great things: and, as if there were a general conspiracy against God and religion, how does the great part among us break loose from all the ties and bonds of that yoke that is light and easy, and enslave themselves to many base and hurtful lusts and passions? and are not satisfied with being as bad as they can be, but desire that all the world may esteem them such, and glory in their shame; and enhance their guilt by turning factors for hell, studying to corrupt all about them.



This sad prospect must needs deeply affect all that either truly love God, or have a tender compassion for the souls of men; and will certainly set them to their secret mournings and wrestlings with God, to avert the heavy judgments that seem to hang over our heads, and that he may, of his great mercy, turn the hearts of the froward and disobedient to the wisdom of the just.

And, till God arise and bless his Gospel with more of this success, nothing could be such an effectual means for convincing the world of the truth and excellency of our most holy faith, as that those who profess and embrace it, did walk in all the strictness of a most holy, innocent, and





exemplary life; keeping the due mean between the affection of moroseness and hypocrisy, and the levities of irreligion and folly. This is the only argument that is wanting to convince the world of the truth of our religion: all people are more wrought on by lively examples set before their eyes than by any discourses or reasonings, how strong and convincing soever: the one is more easily apprehended, and leaves a deeper impression than the other, which does not prevail on us, till by frequent and serious reflections we be satisfied about them; and when we hear any one speak well, we are not assured he thinks as he says, but do often suspect he is showing his wit or eloquence to our cost, that he may persuade us into some opinions that may prove gainful to himself. But when we see a man pursuing a constant course of holiness in the most painful instances, which do most prejudice his visible interests, we have all the reason to believe he is in good earnest persuaded of those truths, which engage him to such a conversation.

After the age of miracles, nothing prevailed so much on the world as the exemplary lives, and the painful martyrdoms of the Christians; which made all sorts of people look with amazement on that doctrine that wrought so powerfully on all ranks, and did raise persons of the meanest educations and dispositions, and of the weaker sex, and tender age, to do and suffer beyond what their greatest heroes and most celebrated



philosophers had ever done. And in those days, the apologists for the Christian religion did appeal to the lives of the Christians to prove their doctrine to be holy; concluding, that there could be nothing but good in that doctrine which made all its votaries such. But alas! when we write apologies, we must appeal from the lives of most that pretend to be religious, to the rules and precepts of our most holy faith, and must decline the putting the trial of Christianity upon that issue; and though, thanks be to God, there are beautiful and shining instances of the power of religion among us; yet, alas! there be too few of them, and they lie hid in a vast mixture of others that are naught.



The two great prejudices, the tribes of Libertines and Ruffians, hardened in against religion, are: First, that they do not see those that profess they believe the truths of religion, live like men that do so in good earnest; and I have known them say, that did they believe the great God governed all human affairs, and did know all we do, and would call us to an account for it, and reward or punish accordingly, in an endless and unchangeable state, they could not live as the greater part of Christians do, but would presently renounce all the vanities and follies of this world, and give themselves up wholly to a holy and exact course of life.

Secondly, the other prejudice is, that as for those in whose deportment they find little to





blame, yet they have great cause of suspecting there is some hidden design under it, which will break out when there is a fit opportunity for it, and they conclude, that such persons are either secretly as bad as others, only disguising it by a more decent deportment, or that all they do is a force upon themselves for some secret end or other. And if there be some on whom they can fasten neither of these, as it is hardly possible but one that is resolved to possess himself with prejudices will either find or pretend some colours for them, then, at last, they judge such persons are morose or sullen, and that they find, either from the disposition of their body, or their education, as much satisfaction in such their sour gravity, as others do in all their wanton and extravagant follies.



These prejudices, especially the first, must be discussed by real confutations; and the strict conduct of our lives, as well as our grave and solemn devotions, must show, we are over-ruled by a strong belief of the authority of that law which governs out whole actions. Nor will our abstaining from gross immoralities be argument enough, since even decency may prevail so far; though, alas! never so little as now, when fools do so generally mock at the shame and sense of sin, as if that were only the peevishness of a strict and liberal education, but we must abstain from all those things that are below the gravity





of a Christian, and which strengthen a corrupt generation in their vices.

What signifies endless gaming, especially when joined with so much avarice and passion as accompany it generally, but that people know not how to dispose of their time, and therefore must play it away idly at best? What shall be said of those constant crowds at plays: ‘especially when the stage is so defiled with atheism, and all sorts of immorality’, but, that so many persons know not how to fill up so many hours of the day, and therefore this contrivance must serve to waste them, and they must fill their eyes and ears with debauching objects, which will either corrupt their minds, or at least fill their imaginations with very unpleasant and hateful representations? as if there was not a sufficient growth of ill thoughts ready to spring up within us, but this must be cultivated and improved by art.

What are those perpetual visits, in the giving or receiving of which most spend the better half of the time in which they are awake; and how trifling at best, but generally how hurtful the discourses that pass in those visits are, I leave to those who live in them to declare. How much time is spent in vain dressing, not to mention those indecent arts of painting, and other contrivances to corrupt the world, and all, either to feed vanity, or kindle lust? and after all this, many that live in these things desire





to be thought good Christians, are constant at church, and frequent at the sacrament.

What wonder then, if our libertines, seeing such things in persons that pass for very religious, and having wit enough to discern that such a deportment does not agree with the belief of an account to be made for all we do, conclude, they do not believe it, otherwise they would not behave themselves as they do. Some failures, now and then, could not justify such an inference; but a habit and course of those things is an argument against the reality of that belief, which I confess I cannot answer.

But, when we have got so far as to escape those things that are blame-worthy, it is far from being all we must aim at, it is not enough not to be ill; we must be good, and express it in all the circumstances which our state of life and circumstances call for. Doing good to all, forgiving injuries, comforting all in trouble, supplying the necessities for the poor; but chiefly, studying to advance the good of all people's souls as much as we can; improving whatever interest we have in any persons to this end, of raising them to a sense of God and another life: the chief motive we offered to this, being the unaffected strictness of our own deportment, which will make all our discourses have the greater weight and force in them.

And for the other prejudices, it is true, there is no fence or security against jealousy, yet we



ought carefully to avoid every thing that may be an occasion of it; as all secret converse with suspected persons, the doing any thing, that without sin we may forbear, which is singular, or may bring a disesteem on others, or make us be observed, or talked of; and, in a word, to shun all forced gestures, or modes of speech, and every thing that is not native and genuine: for, let men think what they will, nothing that is constrained can ever become so natural, but it will appear loathsome and affected to others; which must needs afford matter of jealousy and disesteem, especially to prying and critical observers.



Were there many who did live thus, the atheists would be more convinced, at least more ashamed, and out of countenance, than the most learned writings or laboured sermons will ever make them; especially if a spirit of universal love and goodness did appear more among Christians, and those factions and animosities were laid aside, which both weaken the inward vitals of holiness, and expose them to the scorn of their adversaries, and make them an easy prey to every aggressor.



There is scarce a more unaccountable thing to be imagined, than to see a company of men professing a religion, one great and main precept whereof is mutual love, forbearance, gentleness of spirit, and compassion to all sorts of persons, and agreeing in all the essential parts of its doc-





trine, and differing only in some less material and more disputable things, yet maintaining those differences with zeal so disproportioned to the value of them, and prosecuting all that disagree from them with all possible violence; or if they want means to use outward force, with all bitterness of spirit. They must needs astonish every impartial beholder, and raise great prejudices against such person's religion, as made up of contradictions; professing love, but breaking out in all the acts of hatred.

But the deep sense I have of these things has carried me too far; my design in this Preface being only to introduce the following discourse, which was written by a pious and learned country man of mine, for the private use of a noble friend of his, without the least design of making it more public. Others seeing it, were much taken both with the excellent purposes it contained, and the great clearness and pleasantness of the style, the natural method, and the shortness of it, and desired it might be made a more public good; and knowing some interest I had with the Author, it was referred to me, whether it should lie in a private closet, or be let go abroad. I was not long in suspense, having read it over; and the rather, knowing so well as I do, that the Author has written out nothing here but what he himself did well feel and know; and therefore it being a transcript of those divine impressions that are upon his own heart, I hope the native





and unforced genuineness of it, will both more delight and edify the reader. I know these things have often been discoursed with great advantages both of reason, wit, and eloquence; but the more witnesses that concur in sealing these divine truths with their testimonies, the more evidence is thereby given.

It was upon this account that the Author having seen a letter written by a friend of his to a person of great honour, but far greater worth, of the *Rise and Progress of a Spiritual Life*, wherein, as there were many things which he had not touched, so in those things of which they both discourse, the harmony was so great, that he believed they would mutually strengthen one another, was earnest with his friend that both might go abroad together and the other pressing him to let his discourse be published, he would not yield to it, until he granted the same consent for his.

And so the reader has both, the one after the other; which he is desired to peruse with some degrees of the same seriousness in which they were both penned, and then it is presumed he will not repent him of his pains.

G. Burnet