

WILLIAM LAW (1686-1761) was not the first Englishman to discover Jacob Boehme. The German theosopher was already known to Dissenters like the Quakers and various "Behmenist" societies such as the Philadelphians. But he probably has done more than any other to promote Boehme in the English-speaking world, and was himself a penetrating mystic and masterful stylist.

The Men of speculative Reason are powerless Enemies, that cannot strike at your Religion with the Strength of a Straw. Did you but rightly see what their Power is, you would see it as ridiculous, as that of a few Water-Engines trying to quench the fiery Globe of the Sun: For Reason stands in the same Inability to touch the Truth of Religion, as the water-engine to affect the Sun...

If Reason seems to have any Power against Religion, it is only where Religion is become a dead Form, has lost its true State, and is dwindled into Opinion; and when this is the Case, that Religion stands only as a well-grounded Opinion, then indeed it is always liable to be shaken. But when Religion is that which it should be, not a Notion or Opinion, but a real Life growing up in God, then Reason has just as much power to stop its Course, as the barking Dog to stop the Course of the Moon. For true and genuine Religion is Nature, is Life, and the Working of Life; and therefore, wherever it is, Reason has no more Power over it, than over the Roots that grow secretly in the Earth, or the Life that is working in the highest Heavens. If therefore you are afraid of Reason hurting your Religion, it is a Sign, that your Religion is not yet as it should be, is not a self-evident Growth of Nature and Life within you, but has much of mere Opinion in it.

Law was an Anglican clergyman, barred from the pulpit for refusing an oath of allegiance to King George the First. He served as tutor to the historian Edward Gibbon, who spoke highly of Law despite the latter's admiration for "the incomprehensible visions of Jacob Behmen."

Law gained fame and readership as a controversialist who embroiled himself in just about every religious dispute of the age and took on everyone from Deists to Papists, Rationalists to Methodists.

A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life was and unfortunately remains his most popular work. But, while the book established Law's reputation as a master of English prose, it is, frankly, the worst kind of priestcraft. Norman Grubb, a great admirer of Law, explains, "Law was at that time a legalistic idealist, knowing nothing of grace through faith, and in that stage of experience wrote his best-known book, A Serious Call, which is straight Christian standards of living with no inkling of how to live them."

Around the age of fifty Law discovered the works of Jacob Boehme and his High Church religion was shaken to the ground.

"When I first began to read Behmen's book, it put me into a perfect sweat. But as I discerned sound truths and the glimmering of a deep ground and sense even in the passages not then clearly intelligible to me, and found myself, as it were, strongly prompted in my heart to dig in these writings, I followed this impulse with continual

aspirations and persistent prayer to God for His help and divine illumination, if I was called to understand them. By reading in this manner again and again, and from time to time, I perceived that my heart felt well, and my understanding opened gradually; till at length I found what a treasure was hid in this field.”

He set aside his pen and devoted 8 years to the study of Jacob Boehme. He leaves no record of the spiritual epiphany he experienced at this time, but by the time he resumed writing his doctrine had undergone a total transformation. The leaden legalism of *The Absolute Unlawfulness of the Stage Entertainment* was transmuted to words of pure Spirit, like this passage from *Christian Regeneration*:

Some People have an Idea, or Notion of the Christian Religion, as if God was thereby declared so full of Wrath against fallen Man, that nothing but the Blood of his only begotten Son could satisfy his Vengeance.

Nay, some have gone such Lengths of Wickedness, as to assert that God had by immutable Decrees reprobated, and rejected a great Part of the Race of Adam, to an inevitable Damnation, to show forth and magnify the Glory of his Justice.

But these are miserable Mistakers of the Divine Nature, and miserable Reproachers of his great Love, and Goodness in the Christian Dispensation.

For God is Love, yea, all Love, and so all Love, that nothing but Love can come from him; and the Christian Religion is nothing else but an open, full Manifestation of the universal Love towards all Mankind.

As the Light of the Sun has only one common Nature towards all Objects that can receive it, so God has only one common Nature of Goodness towards all created Nature, breaking forth in infinite Flames of Love, upon every Part of the Creation, and calling everything to the highest Happiness it is capable of.

God so loved Man, when his Fall was foreseen, that he chose him to Salvation in Christ Jesus, before the Foundation of the World. When Man was actually fallen, God was so without all Wrath towards him, so full of Love for him, that he sent his only begotten Son into the World to redeem him. Therefore God has no Nature towards Man, but Love, and all that he does to Man, is Love.

There is no Wrath that stands between God and us, but what is awakened in the dark Fire of our own fallen Nature; and to quench this Wrath, and not his own, God gave his only begotten Son to be made Man. God has no more Wrath in himself now, than he had before the Creation, when he had only himself to love. The precious Blood of his Son was not poured out to pacify himself (who in himself had no Nature towards man but Love), but it was poured out, to quench the Wrath, and Fire of the fallen Soul, and kindle in it a Birth of Light, and Love. {See *Spirit of Love*, part ii, p. 50, &c.}

As man lives, and moves, and has his Being in the Divine Nature, and is supported by it, whether his Nature be good or bad; so the Wrath of Man, which was awakened in the

dark Fire of his fallen Nature, may, in a certain Sense, be called the Wrath of God, as Hell itself may be said to be in God, because nothing can be out of his Immensity; yet this Hell, is not God, but the dark Habitation of the Devil. And this Wrath which may be called the Wrath of God, is not God, but the fiery Wrath of the fallen Soul.

And it was solely to quench this Wrath, awakened in the human Soul, that the Blood of the Son of God was necessary, because nothing but a Life and a Birth, derived from him into the human Soul, could change this darkened Root of a self-tormenting Fire, into an amiable Image of the holy Trinity, as it was at first created.

This was the Wrath, Vengeance, and vindictive Justice that wanted to be satisfied, in order to our Salvation; it was the Wrath and Fire of Nature and Creature kindled only in itself, by its departing from true Resignation, and Obedience to God.

When Adam and Eve went trembling behind the Trees, through Fear and Dread of God, it was only this Wrath of God awakened in them; it was a Terror, and Horror, and Shivering of Nature, that arose up in themselves, because the Divine Life, the Birth of the Son of God, which is the Brightness and Joy of the Soul, was departed from it, and had left it, to feel its own poor miserable State without it. And this may well enough be called the Wrath, and Justice of God upon them, because it was a Punishment, or painful State of the Soul, that necessarily followed their revolting from God.

But still there was no Wrath, or painful Sensation, that wanted to be appeased, or satisfied, but in Nature and Creature; it was only the Wrath of fallen Nature, that wanted to be changed, into its first State of Peace and Love. When God spoke to them, he spoke only Love; Adam, where art thou? And he called him, only to comfort him with a promised Redemption, through a Seed of the Woman, a Spark of the word of Life which should reign in him, and his Posterity, till all Enemies were under their Feet. God therefore is all Love, and nothing but Love and Goodness can come from him. He is as far from Anger in himself, as from Pain and Darkness. But when the fallen Soul of Man, had awakened in itself, a wrathful, self-tormenting Fire, which could never be put out by itself, which could never be relieved by the natural Power of any Creature whatsoever, then the Son of God, by a Love, greater than that which created the World, became Man, and gave his own Blood, and Life into the fallen Soul, that it might through his Life in it, be raised, quickened, and born again into its first State of inward Peace and Delight, Glory and Perfection, never to be lost any more. O inestimable Truths! precious Mysteries, of the Love of God, enough to split the hardest Rock of the most obdurate Heart, that is but able to receive one Glimpse of them! Can the World resist such Love as this?

The "new" William Law drew a wider readership than ever but inevitably drew fire from the guardians of orthodoxy. To the astonishment of all, the once-upright churchman struck at the heart of Catholic/Protestant Christianity by repudiating the central doctrines of substitutionary atonement and transactional salvation.

"God was in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world to himself," that is, taking away from man every property, or power of evil, that kept him in a state of separation from God.

Thus it was, and to this end, that "God was in Christ Jesus" in his whole process.

Unreasonably therefore have our scholastic systems of the gospel, separated the sacrifice of Christ's death, from the other parts of his process, and considered it as something chiefly done with regard to God, to alter, or atone an infinite wrath, that was raised in God against fallen man, which infinity of just vengeance, or vindictive justice, must have devoured the sinner, unless an infinite satisfaction had been made to it, by the death of Christ.

All this is in the grossest ignorance of God, of the reason and ground, and effects of Christ's death, and in full contradiction to the express letter of scripture. For there we are told, that God is love, and that the infinity of his love was that alone, which showed itself towards fallen man, and wanted to have satisfaction done to it; which love-desire could not be fulfilled, could not be satisfied with anything less than man's full deliverance from all the evil of his fallen state.

That love, which has the infinity of God, nay, which is God himself, was so immutably great towards man, though fallen from him, "that he spared not his only begotten Son"; and why did he not spare him? It was because nothing but the incarnate life of his eternal Son, passing through all the miserable states of lost man, could regenerate his first divine life in him.

Can you possibly be told this, in stronger words than these, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son"; how did he give him? Why, in his whole process. And to what end did he give him? Why, "that all who believe in him, might not perish, but have everlasting life."

Away then with the superstitious dream, of an infinite wrath in God towards poor fallen man, which could never cease, till an infinite satisfaction was made to it. All scripture denies it, and the light of nature abhors it. The birth, the life, the death of Christ, though so different things, have but one and the same operation, and that operation is solely in man, to drive all evil out of his fallen nature, and delight the heart of God, that desires his salvation. God is love, and has no other will towards man, but the will of love. That love, which from itself began the creation of an holy Adam, from itself began the redemption of a fallen Adam. The death of Christ was a sacrifice from the love of God the Son towards man, to overcome thereby that damnable death, which, otherwise, every son of Adam must have died; it was a sacrifice offered to the same love, in God the Father; a sacrifice, equally loved and desired by both of them, because, in the nature of the thing, as absolutely necessary to alter and overcome that evil, which belonged to man's state of death, as the incarnation of the WORD, was absolutely necessary in the nature of the thing, to make man to be alive again in God.

Law's loudest critic was his wayward disciple, John Wesley, founder of Methodism.

It is often claimed that Wesley was an admirer of Boehme and required all Methodists to read his books. This is incorrect. Wesley labeled his books "stark, staring nonsense" and Boehme himself a "Demonosopher." He did, however, acknowledge that JB was a

"good man." So Boehme was a morally upright demoniac. So much for the Wesleyan analysis.

Three years after his death in 1761, the first of four volumes of the "William Law edition" of The Works of Jacob Behmen was published (which incited another round of attacks from Wesley). The collection proved to be his greatest legacy.

His books were rescued from obscurity in 1896 when South African evangelist Andrew Murray published his A Humble, Earnest and Affectionate Address to the Clergy under the title You Will Receive Power, and revived again in the late 20th century by Norman Grubb.