

Patrick Hamilton's Martyr's Death

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The Loci Communes as recorded by Foxe

Hamilton's only known writings, based on his Loci communes and known as 'Patrick's Places', presented the doctrine of justification by faith and the difference between the gospel and the law in a series of essays. 'Patrickes Places' was not Hamilton's own title. Hamilton's original Latin works appear to have been lost with the exception of his work against the popish teaching on purgatory, the only work by Hamilton extant. Frith appended his own translation to Loci Communes. This translation is also reproduced with a few variations in Foxe's Book of Martyrs which apparently underlies the Knoxian account though important material is omitted. Perhaps the Knoxian account was based on a summary. Apparently, three editions of Hamilton's loci communes appeared in print in the 1530s and at least seven other editions followed at home and abroad throughout the 16th century. Many editions appeared in Dutch but these were obviously based on Foxe's account taken from Frith. Sadly, none of the English editions, apart from reprints, agree in wording. Scholarship has centred its focus on Foxe's edited version of Frith. Rainer Haas, who has gathered together the various versions over the years, is seeking to bring out a critical edition with all the variations recorded. He puts these various versions down to the specific intent of publishers concerning language, style and theological convictions. Until scholars such as Haas, who is happily still working on Hamilton, come up with a definitive edition, we must be grateful with what we have in the form of the Frith-Foxe concept.

Frith prefaced his account with the words:

Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which in these last days and perilous times, hath stirred up in all countries, witnesses unto his Son, to testify the truth unto the unfaithful, to save at the least some from the snares of Antichrist, which lead to perdition, as ye may here perceive by that excellent and well learned young man Patrike Hamelton, born in Scotland of a noble progeny; who to testify the truth, sought all means, and took upon him Priesthood, (even as Paul circumcised Timothy, to win the weak Jews,) that he might be admitted to preach the pure word of God. Notwithstanding, as soon as the Chamberlain and other Bishops of Scotland had perceived that the light began to shine, which disclosed their falsehood that they conveyed in darkness, they laid hands on him, and because he would not deny his Saviour Christ at their instance, they burnt him to ashes. Nevertheless, God of his bounteous mercy (to publish to the

whole world what a man these monsters have murdered) hath reserved a little Treatise, made by this Patrick, which, if ye list (wish), ye may call Patrike's Places: For it treateth exactly of certain Common Places, which known, ye have the pith of all Divinity. This Treatise have I turned into the English tongue, to the profit of my nation; to whom I beseech God to give light, that they may espy the deceitful paths of perdition, and return to the right way which leadeth to life everlasting. Amen.'

After viewing various versions, this author would accept Frith's opinion that what he relates of Hamilton's views is 'the pith of all Divinity' and believes his treatise may be still set forth as a compendium of the Christian faith which all Protestants if true to their verbalized convictions could accept. Nor does this author rule out the obvious fact that many a Roman Catholic must feel convinced that, as Friar Forrest confessed before his own martyrdom, Patrick's Places teach the pure truth. Nowadays, there is much discussion as to various covenant theologies and the position of the Law within the Covenant of Grace and also the problem of how far sinful man can or may participate in his own salvation. Hamilton provides a possible Biblical solution to all of these problems so he is still very much up-to-date. Subjects which have always broken the fellowship of Christians such as The Lord's Supper and Baptism, Hamilton leaves alone. Below will be found a synopsis and discussion of Hamilton's articles. Frith's full edition can be found on the New Focus magazine website.

Hamilton on the Doctrine of the Law

Hamilton starts off by outlining the Law which he calls 'a doctrine that biddeth good and forbiddeth evil' and which is summed up in the words of Deuteronomy 6 and Matthew 12,

Love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. The second is like unto this, Love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

Here, Hamilton emphasizes both aspects of the Law in preaching the holiness which God requires as an eternal regulator of mankind and the fact that lack of such holiness leaves a man at enmity with God. Thus, he sees grace and righteousness in the Law and condemnation where God's eternal standards are dropped by fallen mankind. So, too, here we see the application of the Mosaic Law as common to both Testaments and, like his contemporary Tyndale, Hamilton acknowledges no inter-Testamental break in doctrine. Sadly, with the development of Presbyterian covenant teaching and its offspring New Covenant Theology, what was meant to be one gospel, one covenant and one Testament has been split into two historical and theological Covenants as if the Old Testament has been succeeded by the New, instead of being a continuation of it with the same doctrines applied. This goes also for the separation historically and scripturally of Law and Grace. This trend is speeding up so swiftly that some Christian

institutions which once called themselves 'Reformed' are now denying any use of the Old Testament whatsoever and especially doctrinally, except as as a provider of historical stories and examples.

Hamilton then goes on to describe general propositions regarding the law when used lawfully and graciously provided by Scripture which he finds in 1 John 4; Galatians 5; Romans 13. He explains that, 'He that keepeth one commandment, keepeth them all. For without faith it is impossible to keep any of the commandments of God. And he that hath the faith, keepeth all the commandments of God. Ergo, he that keepeth one commandment of God, keepeth them all.' He adds, however, 'He that hath the faith, loveth God. — "My father loveth you, because ye love me, and believe that I came of God" (John 19). — He that hath the faith, keepeth all the commandments of God. He that hath the faith, loveth God; and he that loveth God, keepeth all the commandments of God. Ergo, he that hath faith, keepeth all the commandments of God.' Hamilton is explaining that if one has faith to keep one commandment then the same faith enables and motivates one to keep all of the commandments. There is no such thing as a faith that secures the keeping of one commandment only and is not sufficient for the others. So Hamilton adds that 'He that keepeth not all the commandments, he keepeth none of them. Then comes the blow to self- and works-righteousness which some might be thinking they possess. Hamilton argues with conviction that no man is able, of himself, to keep any of the commandments because 'It is not in our power, without grace, to keep any of God's commandments. Without grace it is impossible to keep any of God's commandments; and grace is not in our power.' Hamilton now explains that the same principle applies to grace as it does to faith and the Holy Spirit. These are undeserved gifts of God and not the accomplishments of man.

Next, Hamilton explains how the purpose of the Law is to reveal our sin to us. Without the Law, there is no knowledge of sin. We note that Hamilton is relating a New Testament truth, referring to its origins and continuation from Old Testament times. This is sufficient to show that the teaching of sin and the Law's function in describing and finding it out is a pan-Biblical truth. Sadly, so many Christian writers today, though professing to be Biblical and Reformed, are teaching that sin, as taught by the Old Testament is dead to New Testament readers because the Old Testament Law is abolished, erased and annulled. We are told that Christ has founded a New Law which is given man as a rule of Christian behaviour and faith, most of them, like Ghandi, believe this New Law was established in the Sermon on the Mount. However, the entire Bible testifies to the fact that after righting the wrongs taught in Judaism about the function of the Mosaic Law on the Mount, Christ went on to die under the judgment of the Mosaic Law as a vicarious punishment to save His own Bride, the Church. Hamilton thus argues Biblically and logically that if the Mosaic Law is dead, then sin is dead, too. There would thus be no need for Christ to carry away our sins in New Testament times as they would all be abolished, anyway. It is strange that through confessing this truth in my writings since

the eighties, people who reject this gospel still call me publicly a Hyper-Calvinist and an Antinomian.

So, Hamilton relates how the Law demands a conduct from us which is impossible for ourselves to keep. The Law is there, says Hamilton 'To make thee know that thou art evil, and that there is no remedy to save thee in thine own hand, and that thou mayest seek remedy at some other; for the law doth nothing but command thee.' Here we see how Hamilton would have rejected three new tendencies in modern Evangelical preaching: the unwillingness to describe the terrors of the Law; the modern doctrine of duty-faith and the modern innovation of the New Covenant Theology people who declare that the Mosaic Law had lost its validity in New Testament times and forever afterwards. The purpose of the Law is not to awake faith or any dormant duties but to condemn outright the lack of them and the sheer impossibility of having them.

Whereas so many modern self-called 'Reformed Men' argue that God would not demand of man what he was unable to do. Hamilton solves the problem for them. He asks, 'Wherefore doth God command us that which is impossible for us? I answer, To make thee know that thou art but evil, and that there is no remedy to save thee in thine own hand, and that thou mayest seek remedy at some other; for the law doth nothing but command thee.'

Hamilton's martyrdom

The dating of Hamilton's Martyrdom is difficult owing to the later alterations in the Calendars used in various countries up to the middle of the eighteenth century. Indeed, Scotland pioneered the new system in 1660. Up to then, the New Year started on the first of March. There were differences of up to eleven days in some years. Thus, history books usually speak of 'Old Style' (O.S) and 'New Style' (N.S.) but this varied at first. Thus, Buchanan has Hamilton returning to Scotland in 1526 and says he was burnt to death in the following spring which would bring us to 1527. However, we know that Hamilton was in Germany in 1526 and the Album or list of those matriculated written in January 1527 includes the names of Patrick Hamilton, John Hamilton and Gilbert Winram of Scotland. We also know that Hamilton presented his Loci Communes to the University towards the end of the Summer term in 1527, after which he returned to Scotland. Taking account of the calendar changes, Keith suggests that Hamilton was martyred in February 1527-28 which would now be counted as the second month of 1528. To complicate matters, that February had 29 days, so the New Year started a day later.

When Hamilton returned to Scotland, he found St. Andrews open to him and carried on lecturing and preaching as previous to his stay at Marburg. Archbishop James Beaton (c.1473-1539) (also called 'Beuton'), did not know how to act at first as he had given Hamilton the lectureship, probably because he was still officially an Abbot, and Beaton did not wish to anger

his Hamilton foes and rivals. Church positions were usually mere political posts in those days. Furthermore, young James V. was against the persecution of the Reformed movement. However, Beaton begged the pope to give him authority to root out 'heretics' and the pope had told the King that he must clamp down on heresy. Beaton now began to think himself above James V. and thus referred to himself in the *Pluralis Majestatis*.

Gradually, complaints came in from the Roman Catholic clergy that Hamilton was challenging their teaching. By 1527, timid Beaton, still fearing that the Hamiltons were bent on gaining his property and titles, now always wore chain-mail under his vestments, so his colleagues always knew when he was coming by the clanking of his old-fashioned armour. This was indeed necessary for him and we find that only shortly after Beaton's death a Hamilton became Archbishop. Beaton's nephew, David Beaton (c.1494-1546), soon to become Archbishop, Cardinal and papal legate, was far sturdier in his stubbornness than his uncle and pressed the Archbishop to root out the 'heretics' without mercy. Beaton now returned to St. Andrews after hiding from the Hamiltons feeling he had the pope behind him and the boy-King was no danger. He was bent on revenging himself against Patrick's family by now dealing severely with the most peaceful member of their clan who had no bone to pick with Beaton. The historian Sir William Drummond is fully convinced this was the main fact behind Hamilton's death.

Beaton realised he must act swiftly and secretly so as not to cause public anger. Church historian Keith tells us that he called Hamilton over to 'a friendly conference' to discuss university affairs and asked Hamilton to appear before the Archbishops of St. Andrew and Glasgow on the following day to air his views. At this meeting, Hamilton was proclaimed a heretic and sentenced to be burnt at the stake on the very same day. He was immediately bound and dragged to the gate of Salvator's College. There, the secular powers were ordered to burn him on the spot.

Now acute persecution was carried out against Hamilton's family, some of whom as Hamilton's brother James, Sheriff of Linlithgow, were banished from Scotland. This persecution spread against all Protestants. Those who now mentioned Hamilton's name or faith favourably, as did Benedictine monk Henry Forrest, could be sure of being dragged off to the flames. As Hamilton had exhibited great courage, patience and constancy during his hours of acute torture and had impressed many, Christ's ambassadors were now burnt in cellars, hidden away from public notice so the blood of the martyrs could not become the seed of the true Church.

The official sentence pronounced against Patrick Hamilton is available on the internet in the above cited work of Keith and can be read on the New Focus website.

This death sentence proves without a doubt that Hamilton was a sincere, Reformed Christian who knew his Saviour intimately and was chosen by

God to wear a crown of righteousness in God's Kingdom. One can scarcely think of a Reformer who bettered him, though many equalled him because they shared the same Christian faith.

Modern Roman Catholics excuse Beaton for his murder of Hamilton

D. O. Hunter-Blair, writing in the Catholic Encyclopaedia, excuses these times of Roman Catholic monstrosities by saying:

Beaton showed himself ever zealous for the preservation of the unity of the Faith in Scotland. Under the direct orders of the pope (Clement VII) and unhesitatingly supported by the king, he caused many of those engaged in propagating the new doctrines to be arrested, prosecuted, and in some cases put to death. Modern humanity condemns the cruel manner of their execution; but such severities were the result of the spirit of the age, for which Archbishop Beaton cannot be held responsible. There is no reason to doubt that his motive in sanctioning the capital punishment of notorious heretics were simply to avert the miseries which religious schism could not but entail on a hitherto united people.

Apart from the historical errors in the statement, here we have black on white that leading Roman Catholics claim that their murderers cannot be blamed for their evil deeds. Sadly, there are so-called Reformed leaders who argue likewise.

A great disappointment to Hamilton was that Alexander Campbell, a Dominican expert on Thomas Aquinas who had professed to believe Reformed doctrines now turned tail and joined Hamilton's accusers. Campbell had first opposed Hamilton strongly then, through his disputes with the Reformer, came to accept his gospel as the truth. Buchanan tells us that Alexander was 'fonder of life than of truth' so when Beaton urged for Hamilton's death, Campbell feared for his own life and thus spoke against Hamilton. Buchanan also claims that when Campbell testified against Hamilton, the latter said, 'I summon thee, thou most aggravated sinner, who knowest the things which thou condemnest are true, and didst confess so to me only a few days ago, to take thy trial before the tribunal of the living God.' Buchanan adds that this frightened Campbell so much that he lost his mind and soon died insane.'

One of those converted through Hamilton's martyr-testimony was Alane, also known as Allan, Ales or Alesius who became a pan-European evangelist and served the Reformed churches of Scotland, England and the Continent. He was a promoter of Pan-European Protestantism as a bulwark against Rome and as such was welcomed by Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians and the budding Free Churches alike.

Footnotes

1. <https://go-newfocus.co.uk/articles/app/category/theology/article/loci->

communes-or-patrick-s-places

2. See Drummond's History of Scotland, p. 252.
3. The History of the Affairs of Church and State of Scotland, p. 14.
4. <https://go-newfocus.co.uk/articles/app/category/history/article/patrick-hamilton-s-death-sentence>
5. Buchanan's History of Scotland, vol. ii, pp. 297-298.

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