



The
M A R R O W
of
M O D E R N
D I V I N I T Y





“Anyone who comes to grips with the issues raised in The Marrow of Modern Divinity will almost certainly grow by leaps and bounds in understanding three things: the grace of God, the Christian life, and the very nature of the gospel itself. I personally owe it a huge debt. Despite their mild-mannered appearance, these pages contain a powerful piece of propaganda. Read them with great care!”

Sinclair B. Ferguson, Senior Minister,
The First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, South Carolina

“The Marrow of Modern Divinity is one of the most important texts of all time”
Derek W. H. Thomas, John Richards Professor of Practical and Systematic Theology,
Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi





Copyright © Christian Focus Publications 2009

ISBN 978-1-84550-479-3

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Published in 2009
in the
Christian Heritage Imprint
by
Christian Focus Publications,
Geanies House, Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire,
IV20 1TW, Scotland, UK
www.christianfocus.com

Cover design by Paul Lewis

Printed in the USA

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 or a licence permitting restricted copying. In the U.K. such licences are issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street, London, EC1 8TS www.cla.co.uk.





CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 17

A Journey into the Past: The Story of The Marrow of Modern Divinity 21

 Searching for E.F. 22

 The Two Fishers 23

 Looking in London 25

 Concluding the Case of Edward Fisher 26

 Scotland and The Marrow 28

 The Marrow of Modern Divinity in the Twenty-first century 31



PART ONE 33

BOSTON'S PREFACE 35

TO THE HON. COLONEL JOHN DOWNES 38

TO THE READER 40

INTRODUCTION 45

 Differences About the Law 45

 A Threefold Law 46

1 OF THE LAW, OR COVENANT OF WORKS 52

 The Nature of the Covenant of Works 52

 Adam's Fall 55

 The Sinfulness and Misery of Mankind by the Fall 56

 No Recovery by the Law, or Covenant of Works 58

 The Covenant of Works Binding, though Broken 60

2 OF THE LAW OF FAITH, OR COVENANT OF GRACE 63

 Of the Eternal Purpose of Grace 63

Contents

Of the Promise	70
The Promise Made to Adam	70
The Promise Renewed to Abraham	72
The Law, as the Covenant of Works, Added to the Promise	80
The Promise and Covenant with Abraham, Renewed with the Israelites	86
The Covenant of Grace under the Mosaic Dispensation	88
The Natural Bias Towards the Covenant of Works	101
The Antinomian Faith Rejected	112
The Evil of Legalism	115
Of the Performance of the Promise	118
Christ's Fulfilling of the Law in the Room of the Elect	119
Believers Dead to the Law as the Covenant of Works	121
The Warrant to Believe in Christ	144
Evangelical Repentance a Consequent of Faith	162
The Spiritual Marriage with Jesus Christ	165
Justification before Faith, Refuted	168
Believers Freed from the Commanding and Condemning Power of the Covenant of Works	172
3 OF THE LAW OF CHRIST	185
The Nature of the Law of Christ	185
The Law of the Ten Commandments a Rule of Life to Believers	186
Antinomian Objections Answered	198
The Necessity of Marks and Signs of Grace	200
Antinomian Objections Answered	202
Holiness and Good Works Attained to Only by Faith	203
Slavish Fear and Servile Hope not the Springs of True Obedience	216
The Efficacy of Faith for Holiness of Heart and Life	218
Use of Means for Strengthening of Faith	223
The Distinction of the Law of Works, and Law of Christ, Applied to Six Paradoxes	224
The Use of that Distinction in Practice	235
That Distinction a Mean Betwixt Legalism and Antinomianism	241
How to Attain to Assurance	243
Marks and Evidences of True Faith	245
How to Recover Lost Evidences	247
Marks and Signs of Union with Christ	247
4 OF THE HEART'S HAPPINESS, OR SOUL'S REST	252
No Rest for the Soul Till it Come to God	252
How the soul is kept from rest in God	253
God in Christ the Only True Rest for the Soul	261
Conclusion	265

PART TWO 267

TO THE RIGHT HON. JOHN WARNER, LORD MAYOR OF THE MOST
RENOWNED CITY OF LONDON 269

THE AUTHOR TO THE WELL-AFFECTED READER 271

INTRODUCTION 273

- The First Commandment 276
- The Second Commandment 281
- The Third Commandment 286
- The Fourth Commandment 294
- The Fifth Commandment 297
- The Sixth Commandment 304
- The Seventh Commandment 307
- The Eighth Commandment 309
- The Ninth Commandment 312
- The Tenth Commandment 314
- The Use of the Law 317

Contents

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL 339

APPENDIX: The Occasion Of The 'Marrow' Controversy 345

Queries Agreed unto by the Commission of the General Assembly 346

- Query I. Whether are there any precepts in the gospel that were not actually given before the gospel was revealed? 347
- Query II. Is not the believer now bound, by the authority of the Creator, to personal obedience to the moral law, though not in order to justification? 350
- Query III. Doth the annexing of a promise of life, and a threatening of death to a precept, make it a covenant of works? 352
- Query IV. If the moral law, antecedent to its receiving the form of a covenant of works, had a threatening of hell annexed? 353
- Query V. If it be peculiar to believers to be free of the commanding power of the law, as a covenant of works? 354
- Query VI. If a sinner, being justified, has all things at once that are necessary for salvation? 357
- Query VII. Is preaching the necessity of a holy life, in order to the obtaining of eternal happiness, of dangerous consequence to the doctrine of free grace? 358
- Query VIII. Is knowledge, belief, and persuasion, that Christ died for me, and that he is mine, and that whatever he did and suffered...instated in God's covenant of grace? 361
- Query IX. What is that act of faith, by which a sinner appropriates Christ and his saving benefits to himself? 370



Query X. Whether the revelation of the divine will in the word, affording a warrant to offer Christ unto all, and a warrant to all to receive him, can be said to be the Father's making a deed of gift and grant of Christ unto all mankind? Is this grant to all mankind by sovereign grace? And whether is it absolute or conditional! 371

Query XI. Is the division of the law, as explained and applied in the Marrow, to be justified, and which cannot be rejected without burying several gospel truths? 373

Query XII. Is the hope of heaven and fear of hell to be excluded from the motives of the believer's obedience? And if not, how can the Marrow be defended, that expressly excludes them, though it should allow of other motives? 374

Contents

INDEX 377





ABOUT THIS EDITION



This book contains Edward Fisher's *Marrow of Modern Divinity* along with Thomas Boston's notes. Apart from making the style and placement of biblical references consistent with modern practice, and changing Roman numerals to Arabic, the text is original.

This does not mean, however, that we have not done anything designed to make the book more user-friendly. Earlier editions of the *Marrow* provided Boston's notes as footnotes, but this presents a challenge to the compositor and to the reader since the length of his notes range from one word definitions to a five-thousand-word essay. Our aim has been to produce a book that makes Boston's material more accessible, while at the same time presenting it in a more manageable format. The diagram overleaf uses pages 63 and 66 to illustrate our approach to the layout. We have presented Boston's notes in the following three ways:

- 1 Very short notes of only a few words appear within the Marrow dialogue in square brackets. For example, '[typically]' on page 91.
 - 2 Brief notes of anything up to one hundred words appear as sidenotes alongside the dialogue. We have placed them as close as possible to whatever Boston is referring to within the text.
 - 3 For Boston's lengthier notes of several hundred to several thousand words we have created titles, which also appear as sidenotes with the number of the page where the extended note may be found. Anything that appears in two column text in Part One of the Marrow (pp. 43–266) is written by Thomas Boston. This also means that for the first time it is possible to use the list on pages 9–10 to find out what Boston said on a particular subject without having to read through a blizzard of indistinguishable footnotes.
- 



Main Dialogue

2 OF THE LAW OF FAITH, OR COVENANT OF GRACE

antinomista I beseech you, sir, proceed to help us to the true knowledge of the law of faith.

evangelista The law of faith is as much as to say the covenant of grace, or the gospel, which signifies good, merry, glad, and joyful tidings; that is to say, that God, to whose eternal knowledge all things are present, and nothing past or to come, foreseeing man's fall, before all time purposed,¹ and in time promised,² and in the fullness of time performed,³ the sending of his Son Jesus Christ into the world, to help and deliver fallen mankind.⁴

OF THE ETERNAL PURPOSE OF GRACE

antinomista I beseech you, sir, let us hear more of these things; and first of all, show how we are to conceive of God's eternal purpose in sending of Jesus Christ.

evangelista Why, here the learned frame a kind of conflict in God's holy attributes; and by a liberty, which the Holy Ghost, from the language of holy Scripture, alloweth them, they speak of God after the manner of men, as if he were reduced to some straits and difficulties, by the cross demands of his several attributes.⁵

For Truth and Justice stood up and said, that man had sinned, and therefore man must die; and so called for the condemnation of a sinful, and therefore worthily a cursed creature; or else they must be violated: for thou saidst (said they to God), 'In that day that thou eatest of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt die the death.'

Mercy, on the other side, pleaded for favour, and appeals to the great court in heaven: and there it pleads, saying, Wisdom, and power, and goodness, have been all manifest in the creation; and anger and justice have been magnified in man's misery that he is now plunged into by his fall: but I have not yet been manifested. [Mercy requires an object in misery.] O let favour and compassion be shown towards man, woefully seduced and overthrown by Satan!

¹ 'Who hath saved us according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began' (2 Tim. 1:9). 'According to the eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Eph 3:11).

² 'The gospel of God, which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy Scriptures' (Rom. 1:1-2).

³ 'But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law' (Gal. 4:4-5).

⁴ 'The Law of Faith' (66).

⁵ 'How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together' (Hos. 11:8).

Very short notes appear in square brackets.

Titles in the sidenotes refer to Boston's long notes and the page number on which they appear.

Brief notes appear as sidenotes.





Sidenotes highlight the page number to which Boston's note refers.

Boston's longest notes are printed with new titles in two columns on separate pages between pages 43 and 260.

Boston's Notes

THE LAW OF FAITH

These are the good tidings, this is the law of faith, that is the law to be believed for salvation, which the apostle plainly teacheth. 'The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth' (Rom. 1:16); and 'For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith' (v. 17). In this last text, clouded with a great variety of interpretations, I think there is a transposition of words to be admitted, and would read the whole verse thus: 'For therein is revealed the righteousness of God by faith unto faith; as it is written, But the just by faith shall live.' The key to this construction and reading of the words in the former part of the verse, is, the testimony adduced by the apostle in the latter part of it, from Habakkuk 2:4, where the original text appears to me to determine the version of that testimony as here offered. The sense is, the righteousness which is by faith, namely, the righteousness of Christ, the only righteousness in which a sinner can stand before God, is in the gospel revealed unto faith, that is to be believed. See a like phrase, 1 Timothy 4:3, translated after this manner.

above, namely, the debt of punishment and the debt of perfect obedience. It was also necessary that provision should be made for the sanctification of the sinner, the repairing of the lost image of God in him. And man being as unable to sanctify himself, as to satisfy justice, (a truth which proud nature cannot digest), the Saviour behoved, not only to obey and suffer in his stead, but also to have a fullness of the Spirit of holiness in him to communicate to the sinner, that his nature might be repaired through sanctification of the Spirit. Thus was the groundwork of man's salvation laid in the eternal counsel; the sanctification of the sinner, according to our author, being as necessary to his salvation as the satisfaction of justice; for indeed the necessity of the former, as well as of the latter, ariseth from the nature of God, and therefore is an absolute necessity.

'The Law of Faith' (63).

'Christ's Consent' (65).

CHRIST'S CONSENT

The Son of God consented to put himself in man's stead, in obeying his Father, and so to do all for man that his Father should require, that satisfaction should be made: farther, he consented, in man's nature, to satisfy and suffer the deserved punishment, that the same nature that sinned might satisfy; and yet farther, he undertook to bear the very same penalty that lay upon man, by virtue of the covenant of works, to have undergone; so making himself a proper surety for them, who, as the author observes, must pay the sum of money that the debtor oweth. This I take to be the author's meaning; but the expression of 'Christ's undertaking under the penalty,' &c., is harsh and unguarded.

'Payment of a Double Debt' (64).

PAYMENT OF A DOUBLE DEBT

As man lay in ruins, by the fall guilty and unclean, there stood in the way of his salvation, by mercy designed—

- 1 the justice of God, which could not admit the guilty creature; and,
- 2 the holiness of God, which could not admit the unclean and unholy creature to communion with him.

'Christ and the Covenant of Works' (65).

Therefore, in the contrivance of his salvation, it was necessary that provision should be made for the satisfaction of God's justice, by payment of the double debt mentioned

CHRIST AND THE COVENANT OF WORKS

Our Lord Jesus Christ became surety for the elect in the second covenant (Heb. 8:22); and





INTRODUCTION

Thomas Boston is one of my favorite authors. Through his sermons, memoirs, and other writings, the prolific theologian and humble pastor of a small rural church in the Scottish border country has become one of the pastors of my soul.

I admire Boston for his spiritual devotion—what Boston himself would have termed ‘a heart exercised unto godliness.’ I admire him for his dedication to his calling as a good shepherd. Riding on horseback, he ranged the more than one hundred square miles of his parish to visit each family or individual twice annually for spiritual conference and catechetical instruction. I also admire Thomas Boston for his perseverance. Despite struggling with depression and suffering from chronic physical weakness, he never missed a single Sunday in the pulpit during the course of more than three decades of pastoral ministry. True to form, his final sermons were preached from his deathbed, with the members of his congregation gathered outside the window of the manse. And so, like Jonathan Edwards, I consider Thomas Boston ‘a truly great divine.’

Yet when Edwards said this, he was not thinking of Boston’s work as a pastor, primarily, but of his international influence

as a biblical and systematic theologian. Though he served his whole ministry in an obscure parish, Thomas Boston became the most frequently published Scottish author of the eighteenth-century. His books were widely recommended during the Great Awakening in England and America. We know from contemporary accounts that in addition to helping people grow in the Christian faith, these books were instrumental in leading people to Christ—everyone from slaveholders to their slaves.

Like most prolific writers, Thomas Boston was also a prodigious reader. As a man of limited means, his personal library was small—little more than a single shelf of books. Yet he read whatever he could find, and in his *Memoirs* he lovingly describes new theological books arriving by post.

Boston’s favorite book was *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, which he discovered early on in his ministry. He spied the book one day in the cottage of a parishioner, who was only too happy to share it with the book-starved pastor. Much later Boston produced his own edition, complete with detailed theological notes. Publishing this edition was a labor of love, because the dialogues he read in *The*



Marrow of Modern Divinity saved Boston's ministry by teaching him 'the gospel of free grace.'

Philip G. Ryken

The story of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*—of its original publication and later influence on the Church of Scotland—is more thoroughly told in the essay that follows, by the church historian William VanDoodewaard. My purpose in this introduction is to answer a simple question: Why is this old theological book still good and useful to read today?

Perhaps the best way to begin to answer this question is by mentioning two equal but opposite errors that have plagued the church since the days of the New Testament. On the one hand, some congregations tend to be overly legalistic. They have a performance-based approach to the Christian life, in which Christianity is reduced to a list of rules. A good Christian is someone who does certain things and avoids doing certain other things. The only way to gain favor with God is by leading a good life. Somehow churches like this never manage to outgrow their 'inner Pharisee.'

Yet there is an equal error in the opposite direction, the sin of lawlessness, or what theologians like Thomas Boston would call 'antinomianism' (which simply means to be 'against the law'). Churches like this tend to be overly permissive. They take the question that the apostle Paul asked in Romans 6:1 ('Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?'), and answer in the affirmative rather than the negative. They use their Christian liberty as an excuse for license. They may

even use the grace of God to legitimize bad behavior.

Both legalism and antinomianism are perennial dangers for the church and for individual Christians. When we begin to think of the Christian life primarily as a list of 'dos' and 'don'ts,' we are under the sway of legalism. When we begin to think that it is okay for us to go ahead and sin, because God will forgive us anyway, we are feeling the temptation of antinomianism.

The Marrow of Modern Divinity proclaims a gospel that can rescue us from both of these dangers. Filled with quotations from the great reformer Martin Luther and from the worthy Puritans, *The Marrow* emphasizes biblical, evangelical doctrines such as the sovereignty of God in the covenant of grace, the free offer of the gospel, assurance in Christ as the essence of faith, and sanctification by grace rather than by the law. Thomas Boston loved these grace-filled doctrines and discovered that they strengthened his hold on the precious gospel that he lived and preached. He also perceived, correctly, that these doctrines were necessary to preserve Calvinism from degenerating into either legalism or antinomianism.

Boston was inspired by *The Marrow's* description of what God has done in giving us the gospel of his Son. To quote from 'Evangelista,' who is the book's normative theologian: 'I beseech you, consider, that God the Father, as he is in his Son Jesus Christ, moved with nothing but with his free love to mankind lost, hath made a deed of gift and grant unto



them all, that whosoever of them all shall believe in this his Son, shall not perish, but have eternal life.’

Many of Boston’s contemporaries objected to the language of ‘deed of gift and grant’ on the grounds that salvation was only for the elect. To describe the gospel as a gift or grant for unbelievers, they said, amounted to universalism. Yet Boston understood *The Marrow’s* ‘deed of gift and grant’ as an open offer of salvation, which needed to be received by faith. To call the gospel a ‘deed of gift and grant,’ therefore, was fully in keeping with the Bible’s own generous and indiscriminate invitations to salvation.



Boston loved to quote the opening verses of Isaiah 55, which offered water without money and bread without price to hungry, thirsty sinners. He also loved to quote John 3:16, which extended the offer of eternal life to the whole world. ‘This is the good old way of discovering to sinners their warrant to believe in Christ,’ he said, ‘and it doth indeed bear the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ for all, and that Christ crucified is the ordinance of God for salvation unto all mankind, in the use-making of which only they can be saved; but not an universal atonement or redemption.’ Stated more simply, the death that Jesus died on the cross is sufficient to atone for the sins of anyone who comes to him in repentance and faith. This does not mean that everyone will be saved; people still have to make use of the

cross by trusting in Jesus. But it does mean that salvation through the cross really and truly can be offered to everyone.

This free offer of the gospel is liberating for ministry. For Boston, it meant that as a preacher he never needed to be restrained in giving people the gospel. Even the most hardened sinners and most improbable candidates for salvation could be called to faith and told that Christ was available to them. As *The Marrow* said, in a quotation from the famous Puritan preacher John Preston: ‘Jesus Christ himself said unto his disciples, Mark 16:15: “Go and preach the gospel to every creature under heaven:” that is, Go and tell every man without exception, that here is good news for him; Christ is dead for him; and if he will take him, and accept of his righteousness, he shall have him.’

The announcement of this good news will be needed from now until the end of the world. Every sinner needs the grace of God. Lawless and unrighteous sinners need it. Self-righteous Pharisees need it. Even people who are trusting in Christ still need the gospel, and need to hear it again. *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* reminds us of the grace of that gospel. Both the book itself and the explanatory notes by Thomas Boston reassure us that God loves us and has a fullness of grace for us in Jesus Christ.

Philip Graham Ryken

Introduction





A JOURNEY INTO THE PAST: THE STORY OF *THE MARROW OF MODERN DIVINITY*



This book has journeyed to you through the twists and turns of four centuries of history. Its origins are mysterious, though not without hints and clues that yield an intriguing story. It is a volume which, just when it seemed about to slip into obscurity after years of considerable readership in England, ignited a firestorm of controversy in Scotland. As decades and generations passed, it seemed time and again that it would fade from memory, but it re-emerged, gaining fresh attention and speaking to new generations. It encouraged many, brought spiritual clarity and liberty, simultaneously creating fear, concern, frustration, and division among others. The story of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, its author, and the lives it impacted, is one strand in the grand saga of church history.

The Marrow of Modern Divinity first appeared in print during the long days of early summer in 1645 in London, England. Written in a popular dialogue form, the work features three individuals, Nomista, a legalist, Antinomista, an antinomian, and Neophytus, a young Christian, being counseled by a minister, Evangelista, towards a biblical understanding of law and gospel. Joseph Caryl, a leading

Independent preacher appointed by the Parliament as imprimatur, or official censor, for theological literature, praised the work's clarity, moderation, and helpfulness in 'endeavouring to reconcile and heal those unhappy differences which have lately broken out afresh amongst us.' Caryl penned his preface on May 10, a little less than a month before the bloody Battle of Naseby, a decisive military victory marking the gradual ascendancy of the New Model Army against the Royalist forces of King Charles I. Marked by disorder in the nation, these were days of heady freedom in London for both Puritans and Parliamentarians. New found liberties that allowed for gatherings like the Westminster Assembly, also led to new tensions in the face of the fading religious-political yoke of Charles I and the late Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud. Though by the 1640's most Puritans and Parliamentarians shared a common dislike for the policies of Charles and Laud, including heavy taxation, imprisonment without trial, and the direction of the Church of England, they were not immune to fractious controversy, with its attendant varieties of mediating spirits.



The author of *The Marrow* sought to mediate that spring of 1645 in a controversy over the theology and life of the church. 'I, by the grace of God', he stated in his preface, 'endeavoured in this ensuing Dialogue to walk... as a middle man' between 'the Strict Professor according to the Law, and the loose Professor according to the Gospel'—to elucidate a biblical middle way between the errors of legalism and antinomianism. Dedicating the work to Member of Parliament, John Downes, Esq., E.F. revealed little more than the initials of his identity in print. Why? Perhaps it was a spirit of modesty; perhaps he knew his position was one certain to evoke religious criticism—the specter of Laudian oppression and still ongoing Civil War were reminders that public address was a potentially costly venture, even with the imprimatur of Joseph Caryl; perhaps it was another concern. However, the Westminster Assembly and many of its constituents were living and writing publicly, without anonymity. So why not E.F.? Who was he?

SEARCHING FOR E.F.

There are clues to aid us in learning more about the author of *The Marrow*. In his dedication to John Downes, a member of Parliament, the author notes, '[I have] by mine own experience, and by the confession, and observation of others, found out our aptness to tread in one of these erroneous paths [legalism or antinomianism].' E.F. had personally

wrestled with the issues in the midst of 'hot contentions' in the churches 'about some 18 or 20 years ago, and now within these three or four years last past.' This means that E.F. must have been living as an adult during the early years of the reign of Charles I (r. 1625-1649) and his attempts with Archbishop Laud to move the Church of England away from the toleration and partial support for Calvinist, Puritan influences manifest under King James I (r. 1603-1625) and Archbishop George Abbott. In the first few years of Charles' reign there was an 'uneasy coalition' between some of the Puritan minded and the Laudian regime; both were briefly united in civil and ecclesiastical action against what they viewed as antinomian threats to truth and order. Evidence from the later 1620s indicates a variety of antinomian fringe movements proclaimed law was irrelevant for those in a state of grace. There were also those among the Puritans who noted concern over both antinomian and legal tendencies among their own. Laudian leadership in the Church of England stressed law, or moral righteousness at the expense of gospel grace, in keeping with their movement towards a high church, sacramental theology. As Laudian ruling policy quickly evolved beyond anti-antinomianism to repression and persecution of Puritanism, the initial, tentative unity quickly dissipated. Decades later, with Laud's removal to the Tower of London (1640) and his beheading (1645), the author of *The*



Marrow had both freedom to publish, and a readership willing to peruse and purchase his volume.

Republished numerous times during the years following 1645, *The Marrow* must have met demand and interest. A second edition, substantially revised, came out in early 1646. It included the appended 'Patrick's Places', a series of propositions written by the early Scottish Reformer, Patrick Hamilton, on the relation of law and grace in justification by faith and in Christian living. The publisher Giles Calvert, was a Londoner with wide religious connections who eventually embraced Quakerism. The new notice on the title page stated that the work was 'corrected, amended, and much enlarged by the author, E.F... [and now included] the commendatory epistles of divers divines of great esteem in the citie of London.' Bearing the same commendatory imprimatur of Joseph Caryl, the second edition also included commendations by Jeremiah Burroughs and William Strong, men respected for their theological acumen as Westminster divines. As Independents, Burroughs and Strong pushed for Congregational church government, though in this they manifested a spirit of moderation towards their Presbyterian brethren at the Assembly. Along with these commendations, E.F. also gained the commendation of Joshua Sprigge, a popular London Independent preacher who served as a chaplain to Lord Fairfax and the New Model Army. These connections suggest that E.F., either

by virtue of his person or writings, was gaining the respect of notable Reformed theologians and popular preachers of his day. A commendation by a less prominent divine, Samuel Prettie, gives what appears to be a tantalizing hint about E.F.'s identity. Prettie states 'God has endowed his *Fisher* with the net of a trying understanding, discerning judgment, and discretion.' In light of Puritan love for allegory and word play it seems a legitimate possibility that E.F. may be E. Fisher, a lead opening up at least two further lines of evidence toward discovering the hidden author of *The Marrow*.

*Story of
the Marrow*

THE TWO FISHERS

Historical evidence points to the existence of at least two E.F.s who authored religious works during the time of *The Marrow's* early editions. One was Edward Fisher, Esq., the son of Sir Edward Fisher of Mickleton. This E.F., Esq., who studied at Brasenose College, Oxford, gaining accolades for his scholarly ability, received a Bachelor of Arts in April 1630. In the first Scottish reprint of *The Marrow*, James Hog of Carnock cited Anthony Wood's *Athenae Oxonienses* as giving an account of this E. F. as the author of *The Marrow*. It is undisputed that this Edward Fisher did author numerous works, including *The Feast of Feasts, or, The Celebration of Sacred Nativity*, defending the observance of holy days such as Christmas, and *A Christian Caveat to the Old and New Sabbatarians*, in which he argued 'the morality and divine

institution of the Lord's Day are mere fictions.' A man with royalist inclinations during the Civil War, Fisher's writings indicate a sympathy for the Laudian order of high church Anglicanism. Despite the fact that he would be the Fisher popularly attributed with the authorship of *The Marrow* by Scottish publishers following the historiography of Anthony Wood, there are several reasons why it seems unlikely. The theology expressed in works that are clearly written by Edward Fisher, Esq., does not conform with what would be expected of the author of *The Marrow*. While *The Marrow* was published in Welsh in 1651, and Edward Fisher Esq., did spend time in Wales, the Welsh publication of *The Marrow* predates his arrival by some five years. Finally, all the works which are clearly attributable to Edward Fisher, Esq., bear either his full name and title on the front page, or E.F., Esq. The stated title 'esquire' seems to suggest a self-distinction from the other E.F., who wrote and published at the same time and was a commoner.

E. Fisher, author of *The Marrow*, while gaining numerous commendations for the second edition of 1646, also made substantial editorial and content changes to the work. He toned down bold language; he clarified vague statements. Expanding discussions of the covenant of works and of grace, and enlarging the final section on 'the heart's happiness, or soul's rest', Fisher improved his level of theological and pastoral discourse. Perhaps most interesting, and helpful in the search for his full identity, were the

changes made in the preface to the reader between the first and second editions. In the second edition, Fisher mentions by name 'Master Dod' in his discussion of his own former legalism and 'Master Thomas Hooker' as the one who counseled him toward his conversion, making him aware of his hypocrisy and bringing to him an understanding of the free riches of Christ's grace. Dod and Hooker were both respected among Puritans, Hooker suffering persecution, and fleeing to exile in the Netherlands, where he continued to face danger from Laud's agents. Like the commendators of *The Marrow*, Hooker held to a Congregational view of church polity. This second edition indicated that Fisher was well connected in Independent circles. Perhaps most fascinating was a hint, erased in the second edition, that after his conversion and movement away from spiritual legalism, Fisher's affections for the free grace of the gospel led to a feeling of sympathy and respect for those within Puritan circles who were considered as leaning to antinomianism. Did he evidence a weakness common to many in church history—a greater sympathy towards those beyond his theological position, than those from whose ranks he had come?

Fisher deliberately removed the statement, 'I have endeavoured to imitate the laborious Bee, who out of divers flowers gathers honey and waxe, and thereof makes one combe... yet I hope it will not be distasteful to any...' from the second edition. A marginal reference beside the original text cited Henry