The Saint's Advantage by Christ's Ascension and Coming Again from Heaven

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Christopher Love

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Christopher Love (1618–1651) was a Welsh Presbyterian author and pastor who was executed during the English Civil War.[1] He was born into a middle-class family and converted to Christianity when he was fifteen, having had a transformative religious experience on hearing a sermon by the English Independent William Erbury.[2] Soon after his conversion, Love became a strict Puritan—against his father's wishes—but was able to get enough support from his family to study for the ministry at Oxford University. While a student, Love had the reputation of being somber, downtrodden, and melancholic, but he eventually found relief and was better enabled to console those who suffered similarly.[3]

1. For more on Love's life, see E. C. Vernon, "Love, Christopher." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press, 2004; online ed., 2022. https://10.1093/ref:odnb/17038; and Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: A Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 396–400. The only book-length biography of Love to be published is Don Kistler, *A Spectacle unto God: The Life and Death of Christopher Love* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994).

2. Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 436–37. Ryrie notes that Love's father, to prevent his son from further despondency, locked him in his room to prevent him from attending sermons. Love, however, was determined and would escape to satisfy his thirst for the word preached.

3. See, for instance, Love's *The Dejected Soul's Cure* (London, 1657), a posthumous collection of seventeen sermons on spiritual comfort. The topic of religious

In 1639 Love became a chaplain to John Warner, the sheriff of London, and held religious services at his estate.[4] It was here that he met Mary Stone, daughter of a wealthy London merchant; he eventually married her in 1645 at St. Giles-in-the-Fields Church in London. He had five children with Mary, though two did not survive infancy.[5] Their marriage was one of deep, mutual affection and love, evinced by the letters they shared during Love's later imprisonment.[6]

In 1640 Love, along with several other prominent clergymen, refused to subscribe the Laudian Canons—a collection of rules and regulations for conducting worship, including the so-called et cetera oath that most Puritans found offensive—and was consequently deprived of holy orders by William Juxton, the bishop of London, who later offered last rites to Charles I on the scaffold. There were increasing tensions between the reformist wing in the English Church and those who fought for the Establishment.

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melancholy in early modern England remains an underexplored field of study, and though a few important books have been published in recent years, more work needs to be done, especially since the subject was common to the Puritan experience and contributed to a thriving book industry. For scholarly treatments that deal with this subject broadly, see Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007); Mary Ann Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England: Reading* The Anatomy of Melancholy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Willem J. op 't Hof, "Puritan Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Piety," in *Puritanism and Emotion in the Early Modern World*, ed. Alec Ryrie and Tom Schwanda (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 213–40.

4. Warner was a well-known Puritan merchant and politician. Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (London: Verso, 2003), 310.

5. Michael P. Winship, *Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2019),128.

6. See Mary Love, *Love's Letters, His and Hers, to Each Other, a Little Before His Death* (London, 1651), which includes Love's last letter to his wife written the day of his death. Among a myriad of practical counsels, Love advises her, "Keep under a sound orthodox and soul-searching ministry" (p. 4).

Love sought ordination in Scotland from the presbytery there but was denied because he did not have a formal call to pastor a church. When he returned to London, he attacked the Book of Common Prayer and spoke against various ceremonies that he believed were vestiges of the past, but this got him into legal trouble, and he was imprisoned for a time.

In 1642 Love was appointed chaplain to the regiment of John Venn, a member of Parliament and governor of Windsor Castle. Love lived in Venn's house for two and a half years and had a favorable influence on Venn's daughter, Anne, who kept a diary detailing her religious experiences and the impression Love made on her.

Love was ordained as a Presbyterian in 1645, when the House of Lords allowed the Westminster Assembly to start ordaining clergy.[7] On January 30, 1645, Love preached a controversial sermon, "England's Distemper Having Division and Error as Cause," in which he warned Parliament not to compromise for the sake of peace and was put on house arrest but later released. In 1646 Love preached before the House of Commons and urged Parliament to purge the army of heretics, those who were believed to be too radical in their views and thus a threat to the country. He disputed William Dell, a radical Parliamentarian and alleged antinomian, on

7. There is some confusion in the literature as to whether Love was a formal member of the Westminster Assembly. George Gillespie noted that Love's name was "superadded" later, though Love is never referred to in any of the debates or journals of the proceedings. William Hetherington, a nineteenth-century chronicler, called Love a "superadded divine"—that is, one who was called, among others, to fill seats left vacant in the assembly because of death or other reasons. Chad Van Dixhoorn does not list Love as a divine in his monumental work, *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly*, 1643–1653, 5 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). While Love's status as a Westminster divine is uncertain, what is certain is that Love had no formative or influential role in the assembly or its debates. Cf. George Gillespie, *Notes of Debates and Proceedings of the Assembly of Divines and Other Commissioners at Westminster, February 1644 to January 1645*, ed. David Meek (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver and Boyd, 1846), xi; and W. M. Hetherington, *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (New York: Mark H. Newman, 1843), 98.

the Commons floor, which, at the time, was a break in custom and reveals the seriousness with which Love took the threat of English radicals, especially on millenarian teachings.

When the English civil wars broke out, Love sided with the royalists, along with numerous London Presbyterians.[8] He opposed those who fought for religious toleration because he feared that the rise of sectaries would cause irreparable harm to the English Church and Commonwealth. Moreover, there were disturbing developments within the army that alarmed conservative Presbyterians like Love: the rise of the so-called Fifth Monarchists and other radicals who not only believed in the imminent millennial reign of Christ but also felt that military and political action should be used to bring it about. Though Love had earlier opposed the bishops and ceremonies, he now considered the sectaries to be more dangerous. He fought for a more moderate tone and tried to stem the radical ideology then spreading through English society. Love's posthumous publication, *The Saint's Advantage*, portions of which were likely preached during this time, was in part a polemic against the millennial fervor infecting Independents and radicals in Parliament. Love argued that Christ's second coming would be to judge the world, not to set up an earthly reign, whether a thousand years or otherwise, as those freshly inspired by the downfall of the monarchy had hoped.[9]

8. See Elliot Vernon, *London Presbyterians and the British Revolutions, 1638–64* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2021); Tai Liu, *Puritan London: A Study of Religion and Society in the City Parishes* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986). Liu calls Love "the only true martyr for the Presbyterian cause during the revolutionary period" (67).

9. Stella P. Revard, "Milton and Millenarianism: From the Nativity Ode to Paradise Regained," in *Milton and the Ends of Time*, ed. Juliet Cummins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 49–51; and Bryan W. Ball, *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 30–31. See also Bernard Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972). The Scots and the English initially fought against the monarchy but diverged when

Sometime before 1647, Love was appointed to a parish church in Aldersgate and later pastored the vestry of St. Lawrence Jewry, London. As a fiery Presbyterian, Love spent the rest of his life fighting for the Presbyterian cause and for spiritual reformation in the city. In 1649 he was acquitted of a charge of seditious preaching but became entangled with other zealous Presbyterians who were conspiring to restore Charles II, then in exile, to the English throne. Love, along with other Presbyterians in the city, had opposed the execution of Charles I, feared what impact regicide would have on the Commonwealth, and believed the monarchy to be the best path of subduing English sectaries. For a time, the plotters met in Love's house and conferred how to get Scotland to support their cause. Known as "Love's plot" for Love's seeming role in the affair, the conspirators were eventually caught, brought to trial, and, in the case of Love, sentenced to death on the scaffold, a rare form of punishment for a clergyman, and rarer still in that just a decade earlier it would have been unheard of for Puritans to kill Puritans.[10]

During his brief imprisonment, Love wrote several letters to his wife that were later published as *Love's Letters*. His wife, in turn, wrote a biography of her husband, "The Life of Mr. Christopher Love," which has never been published.[11]

Fourteen days before his execution, Love wrote in defense of his actions. He criticized his sentence as unjust, declared his innocence, and reaffirmed that his life was in God's hands, the only One who

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it came to regicide. The English army, inspired by millenarianism, believed they were ushering in the millennial reign of Christ, whereas the Scots were influenced more by doctrinal fidelity and upholding the Solemn League and Covenant. See Glenn A Moots, *Politics Reformed: The Anglo-American Legacy of Covenant Theology* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010), 94–98.

10. P. J. Klemp, *The Theatre of Death: Rituals of Justice from the English Civil Wars to the Restoration* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2016), 204; and Winship, *Hot Protestants*, *115*.

11. Mary Love's manuscript was never published. There are two extant copies; one is housed in Dr. Williams's Library, and the other, an incomplete copy, is in the British Library.

had the right to cut his life and ministry short.[12] He had pledged to God to reform the Church of England and not to tear down that church as others had done. Attempts were made by Love's friends to secure his freedom, including a direct petition to Cromwell (who, at the time, was engaged in a campaign in Scotland), but they were ineffective, as were the petitions of Love's wife.[13] Love was executed on the scaffold at Tower-hill on Tuesday, August 22, 1651. His last words were, "Blessed be God, I am full of joy, and peace in believing; I lie down with a world of comfort, as if I were to lie down in my bed.... I shall rest in Abraham's bosom, and in the embraces of the Lord Jesus." In his last letter to Mary, he referred to his execution as "the day of my glorification."[14]

Thomas Manton, a friend of Love's and a fellow minister, had attended him on the scaffold and had given him his cloak as a sign of respect. Three days later Manton preached a brief sermon at Love's funeral, despite threats from Cromwell's soldiers that they would shoot him. For a time, Love's execution successfully quashed Presbyterian pulpit resistance to Cromwell's regime.[15]

Love refused to compromise his principles and lost his life for it. He was a firm supporter of the monarchy, believed religious

12. Christopher Love, *A Clear and Necessary Vindication of the Principles and Practices of Me, Christopher Love* (London, 1651).

13. Mary Love's petitions were later published as *Love's Name Lives: or, A Publication of Diverse Petitions Presented by Mistress Love to the Parliament in Behalf of Her Husband* (London, 1651).

14. Christopher Love, *Mr. Love's Speech Made on the Scaffold on Tower-hill, August 22, 1651* (London, 1651), 16; *Love's Letters*, 6.

15. Elliot Vernon, "Presbyterians in the English Revolution," in *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions*, ed. John Coffey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1:68. There was a brief time, a few weeks before the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, that Presbyterianism was restored to ascendency, but the resolution fell apart, and most of the ministers who had influence under Cromwell lost their positions in the Restoration church. Ann Hughes, "The Cromwellian Church," in *The Oxford History of Anglicanism*, vol. 1, *Reformation and Identity, c. 1520–1662*, ed. Anthony Milton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 455–56.

toleration to be a web with spiders lurking in the shadows, and preached wherever possible against sectaries and theologies that sought to establish an earthly kingdom. His actual involvement in the plot that took his life is uncertain and may never fully be known. He maintained his innocence against charges of treason and wrote that his guilt was to entertain guests and oversee fasts where letters were read in support of the king. In the immediate aftermath of Love's execution, there was an intense storm in London that Love's supporters in the city interpreted as a sign of God's displeasure over the execution. Nehemiah Wallington, a Puritan chronicler, noted that for years afterward, fires and other disasters scourging the city were similarly interpreted.[16]

Love's written works, many of which were hastily published in the years following his execution, cover a broad range of subjects and include writings on spiritual comfort to sermons on the state of the unconverted to a treatise on heaven and hell. In addition to English printings, several of Love's works were translated into Dutch, including his scaffold speech.[17] To this day, Love is remembered for his pithy, winsome expressions and solid exegesis of the biblical text.

The present edition of Christopher Love's *The Saint's Advantage* is a slightly edited and partially modernized edition. For ease of reading, the text has been broken up into chapters and given chapter titles. Initially, the text, as originally published, posed many

16. Margarette Lincoln, *London and the 17th Century: The Making of the World's Greatest City* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2021), 88; and Vernon, *London Presbyterians and the British Revolutions*, 232–35.

17. The translation of Love's works into Dutch was spearheaded by two Dutch reformers, Jacobus Koelman and Hendrick Versteegh. Helmer J. Helmers, *The Royalist Republic: Literature, Politics, and Religion in the Anglo-Dutch Public Sphere, 1639–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 103–4. For more on how Love was revived and translated in Holland, see W. J. op 't Hof and F. W. Huisman, eds., *Nederlandse liefde voor Christopher Love (1618–1651): Studies over het vertaalde werk van een presbyteriaanse puritein* (Amstelveen: Eon Pers, 2013).

challenges. It was printed as a seamless whole with relatively few breaks for the reader. The content, which consists of ten sermons that Love preached—the day, place, and hour unknown—was based on a hearer's sermon notes ("taken from the mouth of the reverend Author")[18] and was rushed into print to satisfy a craving for Love's works. This first printing of 1652/1653, the Cranford edition (being printed by James Cranford, a Presbyterian pastor and licenser for divinity books), had questionable authenticity and was published with numerous typographical errors.[19] A few years later, Edmund Calamy, Love's executor and the only person authorized by Love's wife to publish her husband's authentic works, revised the manuscript and compared it line by line with Love's handwritten notes. The result was that passages presumed not to be from Love or that could not be confirmed to be Love's words were excised, and those left out of the first printing but found in Love's notes were inserted. The result was the authorized Calamy text of 1657, which this new edition is based on.[20] Though Calamy took greater care with the text, it was clear from the outset that it still retained many hurdles for modern audiences, not least of which was how the text flowed into one lengthy composition.

Another issue was to what extent the text should be modernized. Readers today are becoming more accustomed to full modernizations that use more recent English Bible translations, updated spellings, and the replacement of obscure words. But given the aim to produce an accessible but authentic reproduction of the original,

18. James Cranford, "To the Reader," in Christopher Love, *The Soul's Cordial* (London, 1652), sig. A4–5.

19. Edmund Calamy, "To the Christian Reader," in Christopher Love, *The Penitent Pardoned* (London, 1657), sig. A3–4.

20. Though the Calamy edition seems to have been printed only once in the seventeenth century, it nevertheless had a degree of popularity. Oliver Heywood owned a copy and lent it out, never to get it back. Andrew Cambers, *Godly Reading: Print, Manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1570–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 129.

it was decided to update spelling without paraphrase or substitution of phrases. Endings have been generally kept (*hath* remains), and pronouns for deity are capitalized. Where needed, arabic numerals have been inserted in places where confusion might result; in the original, it was common for a series of "firsts" to occur in proximity, thus creating a perfect storm for puzzlement.

Punctuation has been updated where possible, though at times it may seem irregular, given the free hand of early modern typesetters, who sometimes inserted commas to slow down a reader and sometimes omitted them to speed up a reader. Finally, a few explanatory notes were inserted to clarify a word used or to shed light on a person or book that Love is citing. These were purposefully kept to a minimum so as not to distract the reader from the main text.

Overall, the editorial philosophy was to produce an edition that is faithful to the original but does not burden the reader with outdated typography or the strangeness of early modern print. It is hoped that this new edition of *The Saint's Advantage* will not only reach an audience already familiar with Love's works but will help to introduce new readers to Love's insight and exposition of the Bible.

CHAPTER 1

Five Fundamental Doctrines of Religion

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.
— JOHN 14:3

This chapter, out of which my text is taken, is counted famous by most interpreters because in it begins the legacy that Christ gives, and the last will and testament that Christ made when He was to leave the world. This will and testament of Christ's begins in this 14th chapter and continues to the 18th chapter of this book. The scope and drift of this chapter is to comfort His disciples, both against their fears of persecution in the world, as also against their sorrows, upon this consideration that Christ was shortly to leave this world. And Christ here mentions many comfortable considerations to fence them against their fears, for this much troubled them. It went ill with them when Christ was with them, and they thought it would have been worse with them when He was gone, and He encourages them therefore by these arguments.

First, He says, "I am but going to My Father's house." And in the 28th verse of this chapter, He says, "Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I."

Secondly, He would not have them troubled because of His departure; because, says He, "I do not intend to go to My Father alone but intend to have all [of] you with Me, though you shall not go with Me now. Though you shall not die with Me now, though you shall not go to heaven with Me now, yet you shall be with Me another day, 'In my Father's house there are many mansions.' I do not intend to go to heaven alone, for there is room for you as well as for Me, and room for every believer in the world." Heaven first is a *mansion*, a place which notes a duration of saints in heaven. Heaven is not a moveable place but a *mansion*, an abiding place.

Again, there are many mansions in heaven. There is room enough for Christ, for His eleven apostles, and room enough for all the believers in the world. It notes the largeness and amplitude of heaven. Hebrews 11:12: "Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand, which is by the sea shore innumerable." And besides these there is an innumerable company of angels (Heb. 12:22). To this add Revelation 7:9: "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues." You have here also the duration and continuance implied. The word is here not our tent or tabernacle but our *mansion*.

Thirdly, from the certainty of it. It is no poetical fiction. These are no hyperbolic expressions, as follows in the text: "If it were not so, I would have told you." Christ does not speak more than there is. If there had been no such thing, Christ would not have said so much. It is as if He should say, "I do not feed you with false hopes of a utopian happiness, as the devil deals by his, whom he brings into a fool's paradise."

Fourthly, from the end. Say the disciples, "But Lord, Thou art going to Thy Father's house, and what shall become of us?" Therefore, Christ comforts them and says, "I go to prepare a

place for you"; as if He should have said, "I go to heaven to make ready heaven for you until you die." As Grotius[1] observes, the phrase is borrowed from a company of travelers which send one man before as a harbinger to provide the inn, and take up rooms, and make provision ready for them until they come. So Jesus Christ has gone to heaven that He might be as a harbinger to take up heaven for you, to take up room for you in heaven.

Fifthly, He comforts them by a promise of His coming again, verse 3: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again."

Sixthly, by this, that he will receive us to Himself, verse 3. "And receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also," and we shall ever be with the Lord.

I shall explain the phrases when I come to handle them as they lie in order.

This text contains in it the most material and fundamental points of all doctrines of Christianity, as,

First, the great doctrine of Christ's bodily ascension into heaven, "If I go" (Doctrine 1).

Secondly, the fruit and benefit of Christ's going into heaven, "I go to prepare a place for you" (Doctrine 2).

Thirdly, here is the great doctrine of Christ's second coming to judge the quick and the dead, "but I come again" (Doctrine 3).

Fourthly, here is the great doctrine of the resurrection of the body, "Christ shall come to receive them again from the dead, and all the elect with them" (Doctrine 4).

Fifthly, here is the great doctrine of that everlasting communion that the saints shall have with Christ in heaven, "that where I am, there ye may be also" (Doctrine 5).

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1. Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), Dutch humanist philosopher and theologian whose theories of natural law had a major impact on seventeenth-century political thought. He fought for toleration and irenicism. His major work, *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (1625), is considered one of the greatest works on international law.

The first clause, "If I go"; it is a good note that Calvin[2] has on these words, [that] this conditional particle ought to be resolved into an adverb of time, "If I go." It is not a note of dubitation,[3] if Christ should go to heaven or no, or a supposition, peradventure[4] he may go to heaven, peradventure not, but it serves for limitation of time when Christ does go to heaven. A like phrase you have [in] John 12:32: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." This He spoke of what death He should die; if He be lifted on the cross, He should save many by His death. The word "if" does not note a dubitation or a supposition ("it may be," or "it may not be"), but it notes an adverb of time, "when I am lifted up," and so in my text: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." There is no difficulty in the first expression, "If I go and prepare a place for you," from which words there are two observations:

First, that Christ's ascension, or going up to heaven, is a ground of great comfort and advantage to all His people while they dwell here upon earth.

The second observation is from the end and benefit of His going up to heaven: "If I go, I go to prepare a place for you." That is, that the great end of Jesus Christ's going bodily to heaven is to prepare heaven for all the elect.

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2. John Calvin (1509–1564), French Reformed theologian, biblical commentator, pastor, and leader of the Reformed movement in Geneva.

3. *dubitation*: doubt or hesitation.

4. *peradventure*: perhaps.